

Mystery
of the
Alpine
Pass

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE

Mystery of the Alpine Pass

ANDY
ADAMS



GROSSET
& DUNLAP
9913

By ANDY ADAMS

MYSTERY OF THE ALPINE PASS

When, for no known reason, a photographer snaps a picture of Biff Brewster playing chess with his uncle in a Berne hotel, a chain reaction is set in motion that eventually takes Biff higher than the highest Alps.

Biff has come to Switzerland to join Uncle Charlie in a secret survey of the Swiss mountain railways and aerial tramways. But it seems that certain persons either know or suspect their objective. Why does the mysterious bearded stranger thrust a huge gold coin into Biff's hand in Market Square? And who is the sallow, scowling man who follows them in Interlaken? Most baffling of all, how does the man they suspect manage to vanish from an aerial tram high over the mountain passes?

Before Biff and his new friend, Tim Larken, find the answers to these questions, they have a hair-raising adventure, find time for some dangerous skiing, help rescue some mountain climbers caught in an avalanche, and wind up working for Interpol.

Here's a story as fast-paced as a toboggan ride and as breath-taking. You'll love it!

BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURES

BRAZILIAN GOLD MINE MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE RING

HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE MEXICAN TREASURE

AFRICAN IVORY MYSTERY

ALASKA GHOST GLACIER MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

MYSTERY OF THE CARIBBEAN PEARLS

EGYPTIAN SCARAB MYSTERY

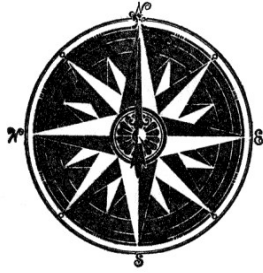
MYSTERY OF THE TIBETAN CARAVAN

BRITISH SPY RING MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE ARABIAN STALLION

MYSTERY OF THE ALPINE PASS

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE



MYSTERY OF THE ALPINE PASS

By ANDY ADAMS

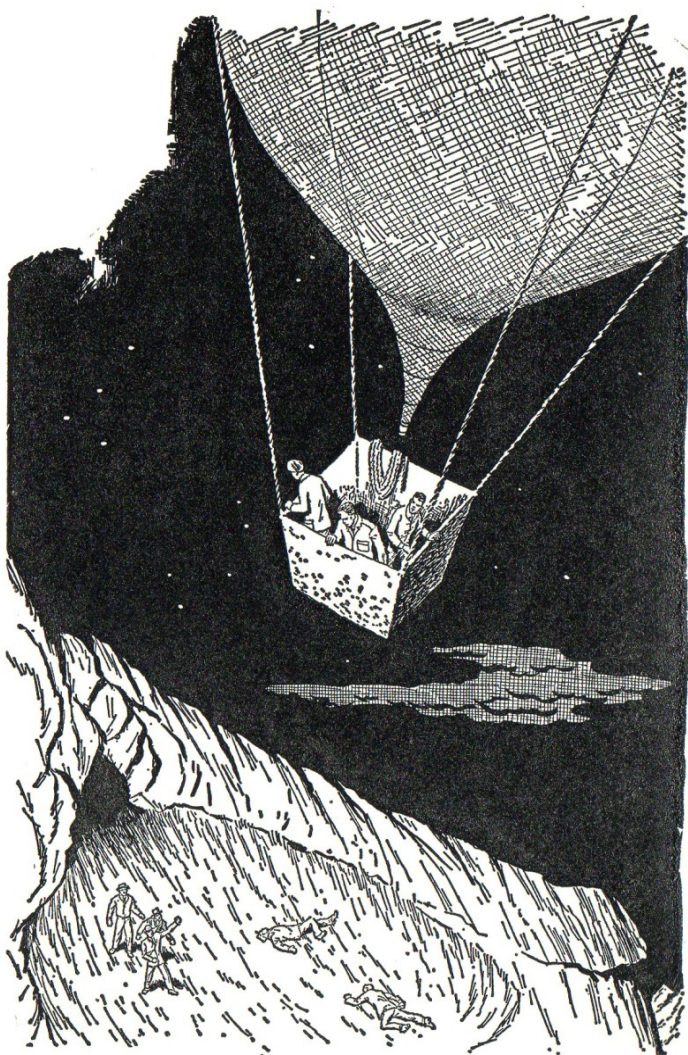
GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

© GROSSET AND DUNLAP, INC, 1965

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Mystery of the Alpine Pass

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A Meeting in Berne	1
II	A Strange Token	10
III	Biff Makes a Friend	22
IV	The Chess Master	31
V	The Doubled Trail	41
VI	At the Grand Châlet	50
VII	The Riddle Deepens	61
VIII	Avalanche!	71
IX	Otho to the Rescue	83
X	The Man from the Past	93
XI	The Trail That Failed	101
XII	The Secret of the Ledge	110
XIII	The Clue of the Coin	121
XIV	Tables Turn Twice	129
XV	The Game Within the Game	138
XVI	The Grand Alliance	147
XVII	The Perfect Trap	155
XVIII	Hugo's Big Partner	165
XIX	One Way Out!	173
XX	Above the Alps	181



The balloon headed straight up into the pitch-black sky.

CHAPTER I

A Meeting in Berne

THE afternoon express came to a stop at the main station in Berne, Switzerland, and Biff Brewster alighted with a confident air as he looked around for his Uncle Charlie.

No place was strange, no place was really new, when you met Charles Keene there. Somehow, he seemed to control any situation and solve all problems, except when he himself presented a problem. That had happened on a few occasions when Uncle Charlie had disappeared under mysterious circumstances, which called for an all-out hunt to find him. But always that was in some far-off place, where such things were expected.

Usually, Charles Keene was on hand, as promised. He was as reliable as the clockwork in Berne, the capital of the Swiss Republic, which is a land that specializes in making clocks and watches. In such a setting as this, if a mystery happened to be afoot, Biff's

Uncle Charlie might be the very person to provide it.

For years, Charles Keene had bounced around the world, pushing odd and exciting projects through a company called Explorations Unlimited, which handled anything from flying planes across the mighty Himalaya Mountains to excavating the tombs of Egypt's forgotten Pharaohs. Just what was developing on this occasion, Biff could not even guess. But he was sure that it would spell adventure, otherwise Uncle Charlie would not have sent for him so unexpectedly.

Biff, sixteen, not only was Charles Keene's favorite nephew, but he had helped his uncle out of some very dangerous situations. In fact, Uncle Charlie often referred to Biff as his "good luck token," saying that there were times when he would not make a move without him. The chance that this was one of those times made Biff all the more eager to meet his uncle.

Sure enough, there was Charles Keene on the station platform, as big as life, which was quite big. Often, Biff's uncle was accompanied by a friend called "Muscles," who looked like three members of a football line rolled into one. When Muscles was around, Charles Keene was dwarfed by comparison, but he had come alone to meet Biff at the Berne station, and he was at least half a head taller than most of the other people on the platform.

Charles Keene spotted Biff immediately, and after their usual warm greeting, he helped Biff gather up his bags. As he stooped, Charles Keene tilted his head

sideways and spoke in a quick undertone:

“Don’t talk here. Don’t ask me anything until we are in a cab. Even then, wait until I sound out the driver!”

Biff’s response was a half-grin, for he knew that Uncle Charlie might be joking, as he often did. But that, too, might be his way of covering something more important. So Biff gave a knowing nod and they shouldered their way through the platform throng until they reached a cab. There, Charles Keene gave their destination, Hotel Splendide, and as the cab started, he inquired:

“Do you speak English, driver?”

“Fluently, sir,” the cabby responded. “Can I be of any service?”

“Why, yes,” Charles Keene returned. “Tell my nephew about Berne, while we are driving through the town.”

Then, in an undertone, he grimly confided to Biff:

“They talk French, German, Italian—maybe two out of the three—and occasionally a driver speaks some English, but not too much. So we have to get one who speaks it fluently!”

By then, the driver had begun to talk but in a somewhat apologetic tone:

“There’s not much to show you, sir, between here and the hotel. I could detour through the Old City, but it is much better seen by daylight than at dusk. It is too late to visit the Bear Pit, and too far to the Rose Garden, though the night view of the city is excellent

from there—”

“You’re right,” Charles Keene put in. “Well, we can do our sightseeing tomorrow.”

“There are the Houses of Parliament,” continued the driver, gesturing toward some modern-looking buildings that bulked beyond a spacious open square. “They have terraces overlooking the Aar River, where the view is superb—”

“We’ll see that tomorrow, too,” Charles Keene said, “but now we’d better go direct to the hotel.”

“Very good, sir. Right now, the alpenglow is beginning to appear—and it can be seen from almost anywhere.”

The term “alpenglow” puzzled Biff until they were stepping from the cab. Then its meaning dawned on him like a great light, which it actually was. By now, the city of Berne was shrouded in the gathering twilight, its street lamps struggling feebly against the gloom. In contrast to the dusk that engulfed the ground, the snow-clad summits of the surrounding Alps were gleaming with a fiery radiance, as though their peaks had caught the reflection of the dying sunset and were flinging it back across the entire sky.

The amazing brilliance held Biff and Uncle Charlie spellbound. Like others outside the portico of the hotel, they watched in awe during the minutes that the glow persisted, flickering with varied hues. All the world seemed hushed, forgotten, until the tremendous spectacle began to fade. Then everyone suddenly

snapped into action and the city lights emerged from the gloom as the sky took on a normal evening darkness.

Charles Keene smiled a bit ruefully as they entered the hotel lobby. Biff followed his gaze in the direction of the dining room and saw that all the tables were occupied, with other people standing in a waiting line.

"You see what happens to nature lovers who watch the alpenglow?" Uncle Charlie laughed. "They eat last, because everyone else rushes into the dining room ahead of them."

"That happened to me at lunch," Biff confessed. "I didn't know that each passenger was assigned an eating time in the dining car. So I missed my turn and had to eat with the last shift."

"Then you probably aren't very hungry yet," returned Uncle Charlie. "That will give us time to talk things over before dinner."

That suited Biff, who was eager to learn what his uncle had in mind. Charles Keene sent the baggage up to their suite of rooms, then gestured Biff over to an alcove off one side of the lobby. Other guests were lounging about in some of the big easy chairs, so Uncle Charlie looked for a secluded spot and finally saw one, a little nook with two chairs and a chess table set up between.

"How is your chess?" Uncle Charlie asked. "Did you brush up on it at that English school during the summer term?"

“A bit, now and then,” replied Biff, “but the emphasis was more on Rugby and cricket.”

“Well, that should put you in shape for a game right now.”

As he spoke, Uncle Charlie smiled outwardly, while Biff smiled inwardly. Uncle Charlie was a good chess player, and he had taught the game to Biff. But always, Uncle Charlie came out the winner, because Biff’s style of play was a copy of his own.

The “bit of chess” that Biff had played at Harley School in England had changed that. They took chess seriously there, and Biff had learned a few tricks that he knew would surprise his uncle. But he was more anxious to learn why Uncle Charlie had asked him to come here to Berne.

The reason came out rapidly, as they made the routine opening moves of their game. Over the chess board, Charles Keene confided:

“Biff, I’m planning a survey of Swiss mountain railways, to get costs and figures on all types. To do that, I must pretend that I am interested in mountain climbing, ski lifts, and old abandoned mines. That is where you can help me.”

Biff nodded, as he moved a white knight to threaten a black bishop, which Uncle Charlie promptly protected with a pawn.

“My big aim,” continued Charles Keene, “is to sign up exclusive rights for Explorations Unlimited to import or construct the same equipment in America,

so we can build them as fast as we need them. But I don't want anybody else to know that."

"But aren't there lots of ski lifts in America already?"

Biff put that question while he and Uncle Charlie were exchanging pawns. Uncle Charlie came right back with the answer:

"Of course there are. But we are making bigger plans. Why not use aerial tramways to open new subdivisions? Or to reach islands, instead of using causeways? Our plans are unlimited"—Uncle Charlie smiled at the word—"in fact, that was why we took the name of Explorations Unlimited. But our ideas have changed. Instead of wasting our efforts in faraway lands, we have decided to bring them home. What do you say to that, Biff?"

Biff moved a castle clear to Uncle Charlie's king row, and replied:

"I say check."

Uncle Charlie chuckled and moved the black king a square forward, as he repeated:

"What do you say, Biff?"

"Check again."

Biff said it emphatically as he moved his queen, for he was suddenly conscious that somebody was watching him. All chess players are gifted with such awareness, and Biff's strained statement alerted Uncle Charlie, who immediately felt the same sensation. With a sidelong glance, Charles Keene saw that three people had approached to observe the game and that

others were joining them. With a nod that Biff understood, Uncle Charlie concentrated entirely upon chess.

The game had reached a crucial stage. Biff was checking or threatening with every other move. More spectators had gathered and audible murmurs could be heard as Charles Keene deftly moved a knight to snipe off one of Biff's castles. But a moment later, there was restrained applause when Biff made a sweeping move with his white queen to take a black castle and even the score.

Then, as the crowd increased, Biff boxed the black king beautifully, and told his Uncle Charlie: "Check and mate."

It really was a checkmate and the audience broke into enthusiastic applause. As Biff looked up, startled by the size of the group, there was a flash of a camera bulb beyond their shoulders. Biff blinked, momentarily blinded, then saw a man dart away, his back turned so his face could not be seen.

Uncle Charlie was rising to the occasion. He reached across the table and shook Biff's hand so forcibly that he brought him to his feet. He gestured to the chess board, then to Biff.

"A great game," asserted Uncle Charlie, "and it was won by a great player. A boy wonder, that's what he is!"

The crowd continued to applaud as Charles Keene piloted his nephew through its midst and straight on

to the dining room, which by now was half empty.

“So that’s that,” declared Uncle Charlie. “It’s lucky we cut off our talk when we did. See how easily those people became excited over our little chess game? That’s what happens in places where they have so little to do.”

Biff nodded that he saw, though he didn’t quite. He wondered about the photographer who had taken that quick flash and where the man had gone. Why he had taken it was also a question. One thing, however, was certain.

The photographer had gotten the very picture that he wanted, a full-face shot of Biff Brewster!

CHAPTER II

A Strange Token

UNCLE CHARLIE said nothing more about his plans that evening, and Biff could well understand why. Anything that was big enough for Explorations Unlimited would certainly appeal to other promoters. In fact, Charles Keene had failed to gain full profit from some of his past ideas, because other people had moved in on him while he was still trying to pave the way.

“It’s not just getting a jump ahead that counts,” Uncle Charlie commented, when he and Biff reached their rooms. “It’s staying a jump ahead, and maybe getting ahead a few more, just to be on the sure side.”

Possibly Uncle Charlie was thinking about business, but he could have had sports in mind—or even chess. That last thought brought a smile to Biff’s lips as he gazed at the night glow which Berne itself now provided, etching its rows of quaint old houses with their gabled roofs and dormer windows.

With morning, the scene was still more striking, for spires and domes of other buildings were conspicuous among the array of white walls and reddish roofs. Off beyond, a series of high bridges spanned the River Aar as it elbowed around the promontory on which Old Berne was built.

After breakfast, Uncle Charlie hired a car and had the driver take them over one of the big bridges to the famous Rose Garden. Though the season was too late for flowers, the view was magnificent. But while Biff admired the carpeted pattern of the old city nestled in the river's bend, Uncle Charlie was more interested in the Alpine peaks that glistened in the distance.

"There's gold in those hills, my boy," he chuckled. "Tourists bring it and spend it and leave it. A lot of that money goes into funicular railways and cable airways, which are sprouting up like mushrooms. Wait until you see the new types they are building, then you'll realize why I'd like to transplant them to America."

From the faraway gleam in Charles Keene's eye, he had forgotten the Alps and was picturing scenes back in the United States. Biff brought him back to the present with the reminder that right now, they were supposed to be seeing Berne. Uncle Charlie smiled broadly and said, "Let's go."

They went to the bear pits at the end of the Nydegg Bridge and found a few hundred people there ahead of them. Many were buying carrots and other food,

which they tossed to the eager bears. Ever since Berne was founded, the bear had been its symbol, and for centuries, the city had kept tame bears for the populace to feed. Visitors were delighted by the antics of the clownish creatures, and Biff was as intrigued as anyone. He was soon wedged close to the rail above the pit, pointing out whimsical bears to Uncle Charlie, who was close by.

Camera fans were taking shots from the rail, and Biff was glancing at them, too, when a guttural voice spoke from behind him. "Look here, please!" Biff turned and as he did, a camera clicked squarely in his face, as one had at the hotel the night before. The man with the camera was already turning away, so Biff had no chance to see his face as he dodged into the crowd, which consisted chiefly of children. That forced him to stoop from sight, and as he did, Biff noted that he was of stocky, roundish build.

But following him was impossible. By the time Biff began to push through the crowd, other people were blocking the way. Some had cameras, and sensing some excitement, they were taking pictures, mostly of Biff, who seemed to be the center of the commotion. A few of the children began to scream, others took up the hysterical cry, and next, howls were coming from the bear pits.

That turned attention in that direction, until people realized that the bears were howling only because they were no longer being fed. But it gave Uncle Charlie a

chance to drag Biff in the other direction, getting him to the outskirts of the crowd, where they reached their waiting car. There, Charles Keene told the driver:

“Take us to the Kramgasse. We want to see the Clock Tower.” As the driver hesitated, he added: “The Zeitglockenthurm.”

As they crossed the Nydegg Bridge, Uncle Charlie explained to Biff that the Kramgasse was a section of Berne’s main street, that changed its name four times, practically at every block. He had specified the Kramgasse, because it was dominated by the Clock Tower, which once had been a city gate, and was noted for its remarkable sixteenth century clock.

“It’s nearly noon,” declared Charles Keene, “and that’s when the clock puts on its big show. There’s always a crowd on hand, so this time we can really lose ourselves.”

“You mean—we’re being—”

Biff broke off, with an anxious glance at the driver, only to receive a confident smile from Uncle Charlie.

“Don’t worry about him,” Charles Keene declared. “He speaks only German. That’s why I hired him. Yes, we are being followed. I saw a car pull up to the Rose Garden while we were there, and when we left, it followed us down to the bear pits.”

“Couldn’t that have been simply a coincidence?”

“Yes. That’s why I didn’t bother to mention it. But whoever took that camera shot gave away the game. I knew then that he’d been tagging us, just to get

another good picture of you.”

“Like the one at the hotel?”

“That’s right, Biff. Lightning doesn’t usually strike twice in the same place, not even in Switzerland.”

“But who is he? And what is it about?”

“Those are things we must find out. If we can spot the man, we may gain a lead to his purpose or learn who is back of him. When we get to the Kramgasse, we’ll put the shoe on the other foot.”

Biff wasn’t quite sure what Uncle Charlie meant by that, but he found out soon after they reached the Kramgasse, which was in the midst of all those quaint buildings that Biff had admired earlier. There, Uncle Charlie made a great show of paying the driver and sending the car on its way. Taking Biff by the arm, he strolled slowly toward a gathering crowd, while he told Biff:

“That phantom photographer should have picked up our trail easily by now. So let’s keep on the lookout for him while we pretend to watch the tower clock.”

“We should know him if we see him,” agreed Biff. “For a phantom, he’s on the roly-poly side.”

They reached an ornamental fountain with a tall pedestal topped by a huge figure clad in armor. From there, they looked over the heads of the crowd to a large but squatty tower with a great clock over its central archway, and a quaint, spired roof above. The hands of the clock were approaching twelve, but there was still time to look around, and both Biff and Uncle

Charlie did.

Again, Biff saw that cameras were very much in evidence, so much so, in fact, that it was hard to pick out a roly-poly man in plain attire, who might be more interested in taking a picture of Biff than one of the Clock Tower. The crowd here was more serious than at the bear pits, and most of its members were older and therefore taller. That made it harder to pick out anyone, but Biff was positive that if Mr. Roly-Poly happened to be around, he would spot him.

So Biff thought, until the great clock struck the noon hour. Then, beneath it, a whole parade of figures went into action. A rooster crowed, a jester clanged a bell, a king raised a sceptered hand, and a procession of mechanical bears marched in a solemn circuit. With each stroke of the clock, the show continued, increasing its fascinating effect. When the count reached twelve, Biff was still staring, wide-eyed, wondering what next.

What happened next was the click of a camera almost in Biff's face. Jarred from his half-trance, Biff looked about bewildered, but this time, Uncle Charlie was quick to see the cameraman and started after him. However, there were too many people in between and they didn't like being jostled. Protests arose in half a dozen languages, followed by apologies, then arguments, as Uncle Charlie, now the center of a milling throng, tried to push his way through to the other side.

More cameras were clicking now, and Biff came into focus of several, as he looked for the roly-poly man, who was now impossible to find, because of his plain dress. A few moments later, Biff himself was caught in the swirl and a heavy hand clamped his shoulder and a sharp voice barked, "Come this way. I help you!"

From the size of the hand, Biff fancied for a moment that one of the bears from the pit had followed him here and was trying to take him back. Then, as he was laughing at the thought, he saw a black-bearded face looking down at him. The bearish man was wearing a round hat with a bright red ribbon, and his burly shoulders were clothed in a jacket of the same crimson hue.

More startled than ever, Biff thought that he was being apprehended by some local officer. If so, it would be best to be on his way before the man could actually announce that he was under arrest. With that, Biff made a quick twist downward, squirming out from under the clamping paw. Next, he dived into the midst of the confused fray, ducking beneath thrusting arms and jabbing elbows, to come up in a quieter spot, some twenty feet away.

This time, Biff looked for the bearlike man and identified him by his burly, red-jacketed figure, for the man's bearded face was turned the other way. He was swinging about, however, so Biff did an about-face of his own, with another quick dive, this time past the edge of the churning crowd. When he bobbed up

again, Biff's shoulders were caught by a pair of hands and a voice exclaimed, "So here you are!"

For about half a second, Biff was wondering how the bearded man with the red jacket could have gotten here so soon. Then he laughed, as he realized that the voice was Charles Keene's. A moment later, he was looking into his uncle's grinning face. Then Uncle Charlie was piloting Biff beneath a line of archways at the side of the Kramgasse, safely away from the near-riot which they had so inadvertently caused.

Though the excitement had subsided, Charles Keene had no intention of going back. Instead, he conducted Biff through a series of remarkable arcades, one of Berne's great features. Meanwhile, Biff described his brief encounter with the bearded man in the red jacket. While Uncle Charlie mulled over that, Biff suggested:

"If I let the camera bug get another shot at me, you can watch for the bearded man. So we'll get a line on one or the other—"

"And while we are doing that," put in Uncle Charlie, "they will get a line on both of us, if they haven't already."

"You mean that they may be working together?"

"What do you think? Apparently, they are trying to find out something about my plans for Explorations Unlimited, so our best answer is to throw them off the trail entirely."

By now, Biff and Uncle Charlie had left the

Kramgasse and were in the lavish arcades of the Marktgasse, the next section of Berne's main street. These *lauben*, as the arcades were termed, had lighted shopwindows, with various doorways and side passages, making it easy for anyone to step from sight. Thinking of that, Biff instinctively glanced behind him and immediately gripped his uncle's arm.

"Don't look now," Biff whispered, worried that his voice might carry in the low-roofed arcade, "but I think I saw that chap in the red jacket, just past a group at the shop door behind us."

Uncle Charlie solved the problem by promptly steering Biff into a handy side passage, so they both could see the doorway in question. The group of customers had by then emerged and were headed the other way, but there was no sign whatever of the bearded man in red. Still, Biff wasn't willing to charge it to his imagination.

"If he saw me look back," he said, "he could have slipped into that shop. It was very handy."

"And he is welcome to stay there," rejoined Uncle Charlie. "We have nothing to gain from this, so let's get clear."

With that, Uncle Charlie threaded a course that left Biff bewildered. He hoped that the bearded follower would be equally baffled, but they made so many turns that he might have found it easy to stay close on the trail. Then, as Biff took another backward glimpse without result, he and Uncle Charlie arrived at

Parliament Square.

“We’re in luck,” chuckled Charles Keene. “Today is Market Day!”

The big square which had been so empty the evening before was now a mass of colorful tents and awnings. Fruits, produce, poultry, wines, cheeses and wood carvings were on sale. Men and women in quaint Swiss costumes were doing a brisk business. The crowd was so big that Biff decided that everybody must have come from the bear pits and the Clock Tower to gather here.

But Uncle Charlie had no desire to stay. He zigzagged his way through the crowd so rapidly that Biff could hardly keep up. As Uncle Charlie skirted a huge stack of cheeses, Biff cut around the other end, hoping to overtake him. He had just managed to sight Uncle Charlie when a familiar, pawlike clamp landed on his shoulder, and a voice said gruffly:

“So here we are again. Like I say, I help you!”

Biff turned to look up at the grinning, bearded face of the big man with the red hat and jacket!

As Biff raised one hand upward to ward off the bearded man, the fellow slapped his free hand squarely against Biff’s and thrust it downward, leaving an object in Biff’s palm. Spreading his huge fingers, the bearlike man closed Biff’s fist over the object and



"You keep this. It will bring you luck."

added, in a low growl, close to Biff's ear:

"You keep this. It will bring you luck, so never let it go. Soon you may need it bad. You understand?"

Biff must have nodded unknowingly, for a moment later, the heavy hand was gone from his shoulder. Totally bewildered, Biff forgot the bearded man for the moment and wondered what he was holding in his own hand. He opened it to see.

In Biff's palm glinted the largest gold coin that he had ever seen. It was bigger than a silver dollar, and at least three times as heavy. Instead of being round, it was eight-sided, and it was obviously a thing of value.

A strange token indeed, from a bearded, costumed stranger whom Biff Brewster had never seen until today!

CHAPTER III

Biff Makes a Friend

USUALLY, Biff was quick to snap out of a state of surprise, but this time he was a bit slow. Danger was not a pressing factor, here in a crowded market square, and Biff was truly intrigued by the odd gold coin he held. Just as he was starting to look up, he heard an impatient voice:

“I’m over here, Biff. Come along—and hurry!”

It was Uncle Charlie, calling from beyond the cheese display. Biff reached him in a few quick bounds; then, pocketing the gold coin with one hand, Biff gestured with the other and said:

“The big man with the black beard and the red jacket. I met up with him again and he must have gone that way!”

“That way” led between a pair of tented booths toward an open space where the blare of music could be heard. People were stopping and looking up from booths, all turning in that direction. Uncle Charlie

didn't waste a second. He grabbed Biff's arm, saying:

"In a minute, everybody will be gathering to hear the band play, but we still have time to spot your bearded friend. He certainly can't lose himself in a crowd before it forms!"

Past the row of booths, Biff and his uncle halted, dumfounded. The bearded man hadn't needed a crowd in which to hide. The band, fifty members strong, were all attired in bright red jackets and hats with crimson bands, while most of them wore beards that were dark enough to look black. To pick out the man who had handed Biff the big gold coin was impossible, particularly with their faces half hidden by their musical instruments.

Above the blare, Biff heard people say that the band came from somewhere in the Bernese Oberland. Then, as the band marched away and only the backs of their red jackets could be seen, Uncle Charlie chuckled:

"Your friend certainly timed things nicely, Biff. Let's hope we run across him in the Bernese Oberland. We'll be starting for there this afternoon. Meanwhile, let's have lunch in some quiet spot where we can talk this thing over."

They doubled back to the old Corn Exchange Building and ate in a basement restaurant called the Kornhauskeller, which was so huge that it was easy to find a secluded corner. The meal was big, too, for they ordered a specialty called Bernerplatte, which consisted of mixed meats spiced with two different

kinds of sausages and piled high with beans and sauerkraut.

During lunch, Biff had his first chance to study the remarkable gold coin that the bearded man had given him. On one side it had the head of a woman wearing a helmet, which Biff recognized as Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom. He turned the coin over and saw a large owl, which was also a symbol of knowledge. Wondering what country the curious coin came from, Biff looked at the head again and read aloud the inscription that encircled it.

“United States of America. Fifty dollars.”

With that, Biff looked up in amazement to see his Uncle Charlie smiling across his half-finished Bernerplatte.

“Why, it’s an American coin!” exclaimed Biff. “A fifty-dollar gold piece! I didn’t know such coins were minted.”

“They weren’t regularly,” returned Uncle Charlie. “If you read what it says on the other side, you will see why.”

Biff turned over the coin and looked at the tail side. It, too, had an inscription, which circled the owl. Biff read it:

“Panama-Pacific Exposition. San Francisco.” Biff looked at the head again and noted the Roman numeral MCMXV. “A commemorative coin,” he added, “minted in 1915. Well, if it was worth fifty dollars then, it ought to be worth five times as much today. Or

maybe ten times?"

Biff's last words were quizzical. Uncle Charlie's response came in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Maybe a hundred times. Let me look at it closely."

"Five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Biff, while his uncle was studying the coin. "Why, that's incredible!"

"Not if the coin is in uncirculated condition," returned Uncle Charlie, "as this one appears to be. If you decide to carry it as a pocket piece, we'll get a soft chamois bag for it. Later, we can have the coin appraised—"

"We can do that right now!" Biff exclaimed. "I'm sure I saw a rare coin shop in one of those arcades."

"And that is just where someone may be watching for us," reminded Uncle Charlie. "From now on, we'll wait for the opposition to make a move—and the less chance they have, the better."

Charles Keene left very little to chance. After lunch, he took Biff on a roundabout route back to the hotel. They had just time to pack and catch a train to Interlaken. Outside the hotel, they were getting into a cab, when a boy rushed from the hotel and spoke excitedly to the porter in English. The youth was about Biff's age, and from his appearance and his clothes, he was an American.

The boy was hatless, his hair was tousled, but not curly, and his face was unusually pale, which could be the result of worry, or even fear. His clothes were expensive but had not been pressed recently, and his

big suitcase had a strap around it, to keep it from springing open, an indication that it had been hastily packed. The anxious side looks that he gave made it seem that he was avoiding someone, and while he was talking to the porter, he pushed the collar of his short tweed topcoat up around his pale face. Apparently, he was afraid that someone might recognize him.

The porter heard the youth's appeal and promptly hopped over to the cab, stopping the driver just before he pulled away. Then, with a gesture toward the anxious, white-faced boy, the porter told Charles Keene:

"This young gentleman asks if you are Americans, and would you be willing to take him to the station with you. He wants to catch the train to Interlaken and there is not time to summon another cab—"

By then, Charles Keene was waving for the boy to join them, which he did very eagerly. He had a tip ready as the porter put the bag in the cab. When they started, Biff extended his hand and introduced himself. "My name's Biff Brewster." The pale youth's face lighted slightly with a smile at Biff's use of a nickname.

"Call me Tim," he rejoined. "It's short for Timothy. My last name is Larkin. But call me Tim."

Biff introduced his uncle, and Tim subsided into a shy silence until the cab was nearing the station. Then, suddenly, Tim blurted out:

"Would you mind my going on to Interlaken with

you? I—well, I was traveling with a sort of a party—that is, I’m supposed to meet up with them later. Only I wanted to see Switzerland—and, well, I’m having trouble finding my way around.”

“Stay with us,” said Charles Keene. “We’ll show you.”

It was lucky for Tim Larkin that he had met these new friends, for when they reached the station, he became confused and was starting for the wrong platform when Biff stopped him. That little mistake would have caused Tim to miss his train, for they had only a few minutes in which to catch it. As usual, Charles Keene had timed things almost to the dot, for hardly were the three of them in a compartment before the sleek electric train slicked out of the station and they were on their way.

Now Biff had a chance to study their new acquaintance more closely. In size, as well as in features, Tim looked a few years younger than Biff. But there was something about his expression that made him seem considerably older. His forehead was large and bulged above deep-set eyes, giving him a scholarly look.

Tim’s stare, however, seemed dull, and so did his manner. He seemed totally unimpressed by the passing scenery which included some of the imposing Bernese Alps. When the train reached the town of Thun, Biff enthused over the ancient castle that loomed beyond the River Aar, but Tim remained

impassive. On their way again, they sped along the south shore of the lake, where Biff exclaimed over the boats that he saw plying the deep-blue water. But Tim remained as silent and restrained as ever.

The one break came when Biff briefly neglected the scenery to figure out the railway mileage. The timetable gave the distance in kilometers and Biff mused, half-aloud:

“Let’s see, a kilometer is about five-eighths of a mile. So to convert a distance of fifty-eight kilometers into miles, we would divide fifty-eight by eight. That would be seven and two-eighths, or seven and a quarter. Now we would multiply by five—”

“Don’t bother with that,” put in Tim. “Tack a zero on your fifty-eight, so it’s five hundred and eighty. Cut that in half four times: Two hundred and ninety; one hundred and forty-five; seventy-two and a half; thirty-six and a quarter miles.”

Tim finished his rapid calculation just as Biff completed his multiplication and found that seven and a quarter times five came to thirty-six and a quarter. Uncle Charlie chuckled at the result, and asked:

“Know any more short cuts, Tim?”

“Lots of them,” replied Tim. Then, shyly, he added: “Or maybe they aren’t short cuts. I just figure in my own way, sort of using mental pictures, as I do when I—”

Tim broke off suddenly, turned to Biff and

continued:

"I like the scenery, too, but I keep trying to figure how high the mountains are, or how fast the boats are going, or why the water is so blue. I just keep thinking ahead, like when I—"

Abruptly, Tim switched again, appealing to Charles Keene:

"When I read things, I remember them. They become alive, as if they were part of me. I think that way when—"

Again, Tim broke off, and this time Biff picked it up.

"I know what you mean, Tim," he said. "In school, you can get so good in one subject that you neglect another. Or you can get so interested in an assignment that you jump ahead of yourself and the next day, in class, you goof a couple of simple questions that anybody should have answered, but the prof never asks you the real tough ones that you would find easy. I ran into a bit of that at Harley."

"That's about it, Biff." Tim nodded gratefully. "In school I was so smart, some ways, that they liked to see me goof in others. So I wanted to get away from it, and when I took—"

Again, Tim changed abruptly.

"Anyway, I got away from it," he said, a glow appearing on his pale face, "and I like people who understand me. I have all the money I need"—he dug into his pockets and pulled out fistfuls of Swiss franc notes—"so can I go along with you awhile?"

Tim was appealing to Charles Keene, who smilingly bowed in Biff's direction and said, "Ask him, Tim."

Biff had the answer before Tim turned his way.

"You're part of the team already, Tim."

Soon the train reached Interlaken, where even Tim was amazed at sight of the mighty Jungfrau, one of the loftiest of the Alps, which towered more than two miles above the picturesque town that nestled between the lakes of Thun and Brienz.

The season was late, and Interlaken had many hotels, so there was no problem about obtaining rooms. At dinner, Tim came out of his shell still more, as if appreciating that he had found real friends. When Charles Keene suggested that they turn in early, so as to get started on some side trips the next morning, Tim was as much in accord as Biff.

But before Biff went to sleep, he found himself pondering even more deeply than he had the night before. This chance meeting with Tim Larkin, whoever he might be, seemed somehow to fit into the strange pattern of events that had begun soon after Biff's meeting with Uncle Charlie.

CHAPTER IV

The Chess Master

SOON after daybreak, Biff answered a jangling telephone to hear his uncle's cheery voice inquire, "Are you ready for that early start?" As Biff sleepily answered, "Yes," his mind went back to the day before, and he questioned, "What about Tim?"

If Uncle Charlie had asked, "Who is Tim?" Biff would not have been surprised. Somehow, the events of the preceding day were like a crazy dream from start to finish. But Uncle Charlie responded blandly, "I've called Tim already. He will be down for breakfast in ten minutes." Then, with a characteristic chuckle, he added, "If you have any suspicions, Biff, don't show them. Just keep your eyes open and watch whatever develops. What's more, be sure to bring along your good luck token."

The fifty-dollar gold piece!

Biff reached into his coat pocket and found that the coin was still there. That at least was a relief. Several

times in the past, Biff had dreamed of finding money, only to have it evaporate when he woke up. Today, the one part of his recent experience that he felt sure must be a dream, was the episode of the huge octagonal coin. Yet here it was, still in his possession, as big as ever!

The first item on Uncle Charlie's agenda was a trip along the north shore of Lake Brienz to the starting point of an old-time cog railway. There they took a train that chugged its way toward a summit a mile above, taking about an hour with stops along the way. All the way up, Uncle Charlie talked about the cost of building the railway and the tunnels through which the train passed, as well as the present operational costs.

Biff was sure that this was a way of sounding out Tim, to learn if he had any connection with the "opposition," as Uncle Charlie called them. But Tim simply sat there with his fixed, deep-set stare, as though hearing and seeing nothing. Oddly, that proved to be the case, for when they alighted at the end of the line, Tim gave a deep sigh and spoke for the first time:

"I guess my nickname Tim stands for Timidity and not Timothy. I was scared from the moment we started the trip, and I kept my eyes shut except when we were in the tunnels. What worries me now is that it's going to be a lot worse when we start down."

"You won't mind it," promised Biff. "Keep your eyes

open and talk about other things, just as if you were riding on any ordinary train and riding along a level.”

The formula worked perfectly. Tim didn’t mind the descent and when Charles Keene proposed that they go on to Meiringen and take a trip by funicular railway to the famous Reichenbach Falls, Tim could hardly wait. Biff noted that Uncle Charlie was again becoming dubious of Tim, because of his sudden enthusiasm.

The typical funicular railway consists of a steeply inclined track, with a huge cable running between the rails for its full length, or height. As the cable hauls one car up, another descends, acting as a counterweight. The track divides at the mid-point, switching the cars to separate side tracks, thus enabling them to pass en route.

It was nearly a half-mile trip by funicular up to the famed falls, and the grade was unusually steep. To Biff, it was like going up in an open elevator, and he expected Tim to have another spell of shakes. Instead, Tim’s enthusiasm remained unbounded, which puzzled Biff until they had left the funicular and walked to the upper falls, where the river plunged in one huge leap into a deep basin of rocks.

So powerful was the cataract that anyone slipping into its surging torrent would be carried to almost certain death. While Biff and Tim were staring fascinated, Charles Keene told them, above the water’s roar:

“That’s where Conan Doyle, when he was tired of writing detective stories, tried to get rid of Sherlock Holmes. He had the famous detective, Holmes, struggling with Moriarity, the master villain. They went over the falls together and that was supposed to be the end of them both—”

“I know—I know”—the breathless interruption came from Tim—“and even Dr. Watson thought they were both gone. I’ll tell you just how it happened . . .”

Tim paused, pressed one hand to his forehead, half-closed his eyes, and began a steady recitation that was almost tuned to the roar of the falls. As Biff and Uncle Charlie listened, their faces registered amazement.

Word for word, as if reading from the pages of a book, Tim Larkin was telling the story exactly as Doyle had written it. When he finished, the boy stood momentarily silent, then opened his eyes and shook his head as though coming back to reality.

“I’ve read that story often,” said Tim simply, “and every time, I could see the falls and hear them. Right now, it was like getting back to somewhere that I had been before. This time, I could see Holmes and Moriarity struggling there. Always, when I see a place that reminds me of one in a story, the people come alive. It’s because—well, I guess it’s because I get so intense about things. You don’t think it’s odd, do you?”

“Not at all,” assured Charles Keene. “I would say that such power of visualization is a singular gift.”

“From the vivid description,” added Biff, “I can see how the story captured your imagination. But Sherlock Holmes managed to get out of it—”

“Oh, yes,” put in Tim. “Conan Doyle told about that in the first story of another book called *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. The story went like this—”

Again, Tim spoke from memory, giving a word-for-word account of how Doyle had rescued his hero, Sherlock Holmes. By then, it was time to get back to the funicular station for the trip down. Tim gave little attention to the steep grade, for he still was quoting liberally from the Sherlock Holmes story. As the car glided into the lower station, Tim concluded:

“Holmes wasn’t always right, though. He said that we—I mean, he said that certain people—had scheming minds. I don’t think that is necessarily true—still, it could be—”

Tim broke off as the car stopped. While they were going back to the automobile that Charles Keene had rented for the day’s trip, Tim seemed eager to switch the subject.

“I noticed that the water of Lake Brienz is green instead of blue like Lake Thun. Would that be because one is deeper than the other?”

“No, they average pretty much the same in depth,” replied Charles Keene. “It may be because Lake Brienz is fed chiefly by mountain torrents and recently melted snow. Lake Thun gets much of its flow from Lake Brienz, by way of the River Aar.”

The final item on Uncle Charlie's agenda was a trip on an overhead cable airway of the telecabin type. All day, Tim Larkin had been staring askance at aerial chair lifts and ski lifts that snaked precariously up mountainsides, but he had seen so many that he should have been familiar with them by now. The telecabin line was more elaborate, consisting of a series of closed cars, or cabins, suspended at the usual intervals from a cable running over a series of huge supporting posts.

Once on board a cabin, they started the trip very jauntily, and Tim was intrigued when they passed other cabins coming from the other direction on the return cable. He didn't even mind the rumble effect when the cable crossed the supporting arms that extended from the uprights. But whenever a car stopped at one of the aerial tramway stations, the whole system stopped.

Then the four-person cabin swayed back and forth, causing Tim to turn as green as the waters of Lake Brienz. What worried him more than the stopping was whether the car would get started again; and if not, how would anyone get out of it? Hoping for an answer, Tim made the mistake of looking straight down at a time when the cabin was hanging above a tremendous gully between two of the supports.

At that, Tim turned still greener than before, and he began shaking his head in terror despite Biff's arguments that this was one of the safest spots in

Switzerland. Fortunately, there were no long stops after that, but Tim was very glad when the sky ride was over and they were returning to Interlaken by automobile. When they arrived, Charles Keene dropped the boys at the hotel, while he took the car back to the rental office.

There, in a corner of the lobby, Biff noticed a chess table like the one at Berne. Hoping to bring Tim back to normal, Biff asked, "Do you play chess?" Tim's face lighted up, and he nodded. They decided to play a game. With the stately Jungfrau looming as a distant audience beyond the window, Biff made the opening move, hoping that Tim would give him as good competition as some of the boys at Harley.

In the first game, Tim managed to trap Biff into a fairly early checkmate. Tim seemed pleased by his rapid victory, so Biff announced:

"All right, chum. Now that you've gotten back the self-confidence you lost on the sky ride, I'll show you some real chess. You're playing white this game, so go ahead. Move."

Tim moved. Soon they were deep in the game and it seemed nip and tuck to Biff, because they each had lost a castle, knight, and bishop, and Biff had lost only one more pawn than Tim. Biff had just completed a routine move, when Tim remarked:

"That does it. You may as well resign."

"Resign?" Biff was incredulous. "You mean give up? Why, you're only one pawn better off than I am!"

“And that makes all the difference.”

“One pawn? Why, that’s ridiculous, Tim.”

“Is it?” Tim moved his queen. “Check.”

Biff had expected that. He moved his king one square, so that his own queen threatened Tim’s. Promptly, Tim used his queen to take Biff’s; so Biff used his king to take Tim’s queen. That made it simply an exchange of queens. But a few moves later, Tim engineered an exchange of knights and then bishops. As if he had rehearsed it all beforehand, Tim next forced an exchange of castles.

That left Tim with three pawns, all blocking three that Biff still had. But Tim also had that extra pawn, so well advanced that he simply moved it to the end of the board, reaching the final square and turning it into a queen, before Biff could overtake it with his king. That made it easy for Tim to clinch a checkmate.

“See what I mean, Biff?” queried Tim. “The big difference one little pawn can make?”

As Biff nodded, quite amazed, a low chuckle came from beside them. The boys looked up to see Charles Keene standing there holding a newspaper.

“Your picture is on the front page, Biff,” Uncle Charlie informed him. “Read what it says about you.”

Sure enough, there was Biff’s picture, and he was looking up from a chess table, no less. This must have been the camera shot that the roly-poly man took in Berne, at the hotel. The caption was in French, but Biff could read the language well enough to translate it,

which he did, aloud:

“Boy Wonder Comes to Berne.”

Biff frowned, more perplexed than ever, then he looked up at Uncle Charlie, whose smile had widened.

“Boy wonder,” repeated Biff. “What does that mean?”

“Read the small print under the picture,” suggested Uncle Charlie, with a sly look toward Tim. “That will tell you, Biff.”

“America’s youthful marvel is here in Berne,” read Biff. “He is Timothy Larkin, one of the youngest chess masters to play in international competition—”

Biff broke off and stared accusingly at Tim. While Biff was trying to find words, Tim insisted pleadingly:

“I didn’t ask you to play tonight. It was your idea, Biff. Maybe I should have said I didn’t know how to play chess, but that would have been a lie. Anyway, I wanted to play when I saw the board. It’s kind of instinctive with me. Really, Biff, I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“Hurt me!” echoed Biff. “You’ve helped me. I learned more about chess in that one game than in all the games I’ve ever played before.” Biff turned to Uncle Charlie: “I see how it was now. When those people saw me playing chess with you, they thought I was Tim!”

“Particularly since you were winning,” Uncle Charlie reminded him, “but I forgive you, Biff, after seeing Tim take you so neatly tonight.”

Biff turned to Tim and asked:

“But how did they come to miss you, Tim? Wait, I have it—you were dodging them, weren’t you? The cameramen?”

As Tim nodded, Uncle Charlie said to Biff:

“That’s enough for the moment, Sherlock. Let’s go to dinner and discuss the rest of it then.” He clapped both boys on the shoulders as he spoke. “I think we know Tim well enough to take him into our confidence, Biff. After he’s heard our story, he can tell us his.”

CHAPTER V

The Doubled Trail

DURING dinner, Charles Keene explained his situation very briefly to Tim Larkin, simply stating that he was in Switzerland on business and did not want his competitors to interfere with his plans. That satisfied the youthful chess player, for he didn't even ask what Mr. Keene's business was. Indeed, Tim was so eager to go into his own story that Charles Keene smilingly cut his comments short and suggested:

"Now tell us your problems, Tim."

"I have only one real problem," declared Tim seriously. "That's my manager, Bert Shelby. He always tries to show me off."

"Isn't that part of the game?" queried Biff. "If people know that you're a chess champ, they must want to see you play."

"I agree with that," Tim nodded, "but Mr. Shelby is always cooking up special stunts. He has me meet celebrities and attend banquets. I've even had to make

speeches, which I'm no good at. He wants me to take an interest in other things when I would rather play chess. When he wanted me to travel through Europe with a group, just for publicity, I packed up and left. I preferred to make my own friends."

"You've made a couple already," Biff assured him. "Did your manager know that you were going to Berne?"

"No, but he could have sent word anywhere."

"Didn't he have some pictures of you?"

"Some press photos, yes." Tim gave a sly smile. "But I took them all with me. They are in my bag. I left a note for Mr. Shelby, saying I would bring them to Mondeau when I meet him there."

"To Mondeau?" queried Charles Keene in surprise. "Why, that's the great resort area that isn't supposed to open until some time next year!"

"They put the opening ahead," Tim said, "in order to hold the International Chess Congress there. I guess that most chess players feel the way I do. They don't want to be gawked at."

"Mondeau," mused Charles Keene. "That means the new cable lift must be open from Hautburg, where they have the watch factories. Would you know about that, Tim?"

Biff realized that Uncle Charlie was eager now, because he wanted to know the latest developments in aerial cableways. But that point completely escaped Tim Larkin.

"I know one thing," declared Tim. "The hotel is open, and they are taking other guests as well as the chess players, because Mr. Shelby is bringing the whole group there, as part of the deal."

"Good," decided Charles Keene. "Then Biff and I can go there." He turned to Biff. "Show the coin to Tim."

Biff brought out the fifty-dollar gold piece and handed it to Tim, who stared at it, quite awed. Then Charles Keene stated bluntly:

"A man handed that to Biff in Berne. He might have believed he was giving it to you, Tim, considering this mix-up. He said it would bring luck, and not to let it go. Could he have thought that he was giving it to you instead of Biff?"

All that Tim had to say was "Yes," and the coin would have been his. Instead, Tim shook his head emphatically.

"I wouldn't know about it," he declared. "I never went in for coin collecting. To me, it doesn't carry a challenge like chess. But if anyone *had* given me that coin, I would have kept it."

Tim half closed his fingers about the gold piece, which could have been his for the taking. Biff assured him of that.

"It's yours, Tim, if you want it," he said. "As Uncle Charlie says, maybe it was meant for you."

"But it was given to you, Biff," returned Tim. Hastily, he placed the coin back in Biff's hand. "So it's yours to keep. I wouldn't want you to have bad luck,

Biff.”

Charles Keene put the next question:

“Are you superstitious about such things, Tim?”

“Yes, I am,” Tim admitted. “When I play a big chess match, I like to use my own men. I don’t want anything to happen before a big game, or it will disturb me. If I had been given that coin, I would have kept it. So I think Biff should.” Tim paused, as he studied his new friends. Then, with one of his oddly-wise grins, he added, “I’d better give you some more chess lessons, Biff.”

“You’re right.” Biff nodded. “If a few more newspapers pick up that story from Berne, using my picture, a lot of people are going to be thinking that I’m you, Tim.”

“And that,” decided Uncle Charlie, “gives me a good idea. Let it rest until tomorrow and see how it jells.”

With morning, it had jelled nicely. Another newspaper was in from Berne, proclaiming that the greatest of all boy chess wizards had visited the Swiss capital. This account carried two pictures, one showing the young chess master matching wits with the Bernese bears, the other portraying his amazement as he stared at the Clock Tower. But the “chess wizard” in both pictures was Biff Brewster, not Tim Larkin. When Tim saw that, he supplied one of his odd smiles.

“See what I mean?” he said almost pleadingly. “My manager, Mr. Shelby, makes me do crazy things like that. Next day, I meet some person who says, ‘Oh,

you're the great chess wizard! I saw you trying to beat an electronic computer. Who won?' Before I can answer, they are asking some other question." Happily, Tim clapped Biff on the back. "It's your turn now, Biff. People will grab you on the street and say, 'How did you make out with the bears? I hear you exchanged a knight and bishop for three carrots.' They think that's funny. Maybe it is. What do you think?"

As Tim broke off, laughing, Biff turned to Charles Keene and inquired soberly, "What do you think, Uncle Charlie?"

"I think Tim is right," declared Charles Keene very seriously. "Today, Biff, we'll go up the Jungfrau, and you will play the part of Tim Larkin, the boy chess wonder, while I act as your manager. As for you, Tim"—Charles Keene turned to the real chess wizard—"you can come along and see the fun."

It was fun for all but Biff. As he walked along the street with Uncle Charlie, people stopped, studied Biff as though they remembered him, then spoke excitedly to others. Next, Uncle Charlie would whisk Biff around a corner, where Tim would catch up with them and get into the huddle.

"You'd better ask Tim for permission to sign his name, Biff," chuckled Uncle Charlie. "Soon his public will be catching up with you, wanting you to give them autographs."

Tim gleefully gave Biff the needed permission and tagged along while they resumed the stroll. Now, the

autograph hounds began to catch up, and soon Biff's hand was tiring from signing "Timothy Larkin" over and over. His ears were tiring, too, from the loud way people shouted at him. Even worse, they were saying the very things Tim said they would, and they all laughed loudly, thinking their jokes were original.

At last, Uncle Charlie piloted Biff around another corner and into a souvenir shop, where he equipped him with a pair of oversized dark glasses and a beret, which hid his light hair, a very noticeable feature in the newspaper photographs. With Biff thus disguised, they avoided attention until they reached a railroad station at the east end of Interlaken. There, at Uncle Charlie's suggestion, Biff removed the glasses and beret just before taking a train for the Jungfrau.

Minutes later, they were alone in a compartment and the train was on its way. Then Charles Keene announced:

"I'd like to get to the bottom of this. If somebody is checking on Tim, we should find out how near they are and how far they intend to go. So let's keep a close watch."

To get to the bottom of things, they were going to the top, for the Jungfrau was certainly the highest thing in this part of Switzerland. Seen from Interlaken, the Jungfrau loomed like a solitary summit framed by the walls of a mountain pass; but from Kleine Scheidegg, where they changed trains, there was a splendid view of three companion peaks. They were

the Monch, the Eiger, and the Jungfrau, the last and the highest of the trio. At mere sight of them, Tim gasped at the idea of a train scaling to those two-and-a-half-mile altitudes.

"You must be kidding about going up the Jungfrau," declared Tim. "Why, any kind of a slip or a slide would not only sweep away the train, it would carry the whole track with it."

"Very probably," agreed Uncle Charlie. "So to avoid it, they built the railroad up inside those mountains."

"Inside them!" snorted Tim. "Now I know you're really trying to kid me."

Biff, by then, had managed to wrench his gaze from the stupendous summits to glance along the platform. Other people were too intrigued with the scenery to notice Biff, with one exception. A man who looked like a porter was staring hard at Biff, as though trying to identify him as Tim Larkin. What made Biff sure of that was the way the man turned and ambled quickly away the moment Biff's eyes met his.

They took a train on the Jungfrau line, and the view became more magnificent as they made the cogged ascent. At a station near the foot of the Eiger, they studied the glacier just below. Then the train plunged into a tunnel, through which it traveled steadily upward for the next hour. Tim was amazed to find out that Charles Keene had not been kidding him at all, for the cog road actually gained its last mile of altitude through a tunnel four and half miles long.

The train made two stops, giving the passengers views through huge lookouts hewn in the mountain. Then came the steepest climb to a railroad terminal within the rock, with an underground passage to a hotel which was situated on a sheltered ledge called the Jungfraujoch, not far below the summit.

Another passage led to an elevator that rose three hundred and fifty feet to an observatory on a rocky knob appropriately called the Sphinx; and still another tunnel led to an ice palace. So there was plenty to interest both Biff and Tim, who by now had conquered most of his timidity where heights were concerned. As a result, when Charles Keene decided they would stay at the hotel overnight, the boys were highly pleased.

From the observatory, they could see occasional avalanches on distant peaks, as chunks of snow, ice, or rock broke loose and slid from mountain folds and ledges. Then came a strange sunset, very vivid at this altitude and after that, they went to the hotel. There, and at the ice palace, Biff was positive that a few people studied him, as though mistaking him for Tim. But there was no approach, no outright interest, no requests for autographs, as in Interlaken. Biff mentioned that to Uncle Charlie, who voiced the prompt opinion:

“It’s just as I suspected. These people have been tipped off to look for Tim and to report back. Just why, is something we must find out after we return to Interlaken.”

They rose early the next morning to view the sunrise which matched the sunset in magnificence; then began the slow but interesting journey back to Interlaken. There were no incidents on the trip, other than a few chance glances from persons on station platforms. But when they reached Interlaken, Charles Keene had his campaign mapped out.

“Biff and I will go ahead,” he declared, “and you can follow, Tim, as though you didn’t know us. When we stop to look at newspapers, come on past us and tell us what you have seen—if anything.”

The plan worked to perfection. Biff put on his glasses and beret while going through the station; then took them off when he studied the newspapers. None of them had his picture today, and he was smilingly mentioning that to Uncle Charlie, when Tim came shuffling by. Tim’s voice came in a quick, tense undertone:

“You’ve been spotted—and how! Whoever he is, he looks like an expert. When he slides away, I’ll follow him, so all you need to do is follow me!”

CHAPTER VI

At the Grand Châlet

THE real Tim Larkin did a shadowing job that was good, but brief. He started off on the mystery man's trail and when Biff and Uncle Charlie followed, Tim was already about a block away when they sighted him. Ahead of him was a stocky man, wearing a dark leather jacket and a hunting cap, who kept moving at a steady pace, but with a noticeable limp.

Whenever the stocky man showed a tendency to pause, Tim effaced himself, stopping to look in a window, or even stepping into a doorway. Biff and his Uncle Charlie found themselves smiling at each other as they noted Tim's actions, but their smiles became a bit grim, for they realized that this might be serious business. Tim most certainly was handling it as such.

Then the whole trail suddenly reversed itself. The stocky man turned a corner without an instant's warning, and Tim darted after him, eager to make sure that he didn't slip from sight. At the corner itself, Tim

spun about and came springing back, waving a warning to the others. Then Tim disappeared into a doorway or somewhere, just before the stocky man came stalking back.

If it hadn't been for Tim's quick quest for shelter, Biff and Uncle Charlie might not have recognized the man. He had thrust his hunting cap into his pocket and had opened his jacket so it hung loose. Even his limp was less noticeable as he doubled back on his trail. Tim had obviously spotted the quick change that the man was making and had lost no time in getting out of sight, which was good. For the stocky man's rapid side glances indicated that he was looking for some sneaky follower. Apparently, the last persons he expected to encounter were Charles Keene and Biff Brewster, the supposed Tim Larkin.

The fellow really was an expert, as Tim had claimed. He gave no sign of recognition as he passed Biff and Charles Keene. He stared right through them and, to all intents and purposes, he might have been a totally different person than the man who had gone around the corner a few moments before. But Biff and Uncle Charlie played it straight, too, keeping up their conversation and giving the stocky man no more than a passing glance.

But that was enough to remember him by. In pocketing his cap, the fellow hadn't been expecting to meet people head on. Biff and his uncle saw a swarthy face, with sharp, narrowed eyes and a blunt nose. The

man's forehead was furrowed between his heavy eyebrows and his low hairline, giving him an expression that resembled a perpetual scowl.

He had a right to be scowling, considering that he was on his way back to look for two people who now were strolling nonchalantly past him. But the scowl made it seem that he was engrossed in his own thoughts, rather than worrying about anyone he chanced to meet on the street.

As they continued on their way, Uncle Charlie muttered to Biff, "Don't look back, whatever you do." Then, as Biff nodded, his uncle queried, "You'd remember that face if you saw it again, wouldn't you?" Another nod from Biff, and Charles Keene added, "I think we will be seeing it. But here's our corner. Let's turn it and wait for Tim."

Soon Tim joined them, eager and breathless, with more to report.

"We sure ditched old scowly-face," he panted. "I can do other things besides play chess, can't I?"

"You sure can, Tim," agreed Biff. "But you still were using chess tactics, the way you ducked out of trouble when your adversary made his move. I'd call it a good gambit."

Tim smiled at the compliment, and Charles Keene added another:

"I'd say, Tim, that you're the real Sherlock Holmes of this group." Then, as Tim showed a momentary scowl of his own, Charles Keene added, "I forgot that

you were annoyed at Sherlock Holmes. Why?"

"Because in one of his stories," replied Tim, "he threw suspicion on a chess player, saying that such interest was an indication of a scheming mind." Tim paused, then brightened. "Maybe I am a schemer. I helped scheme our way out of this, didn't I?"

"We aren't out of it yet," asserted Charles Keene. "We started with a roly-poly photographer taking Biff's picture, thinking Biff was you, Tim. Then a big bearded man got in the act, giving Biff that rare gold coin. Suddenly, Biff's picture was in the newspapers and the public was acclaiming him as Tim Larkin. It subsided, as such things do, but a hard core of watchers still stayed on the job. So now a sallow man with a scowl and a noticeable limp takes over. If he's lost us, it won't be for long."

"I guess you're right, Mr. Keene," admitted Tim. "I'm good at ducking, though"—his face broadened in one of his wise grins—"so maybe you and Biff should try it, too."

"Why duck at all?" put in Biff. "If Mr. Scowl-Face is trying to double back on our trail, why not let him, so we can double back on his?"

Charles Keene pondered over the question; then nodded.

"Awhile back, I'd have said no," he declared. "There were too many hands mixed in it. But now that it's narrowed down to one man who seems to be the kingpin, it would be nice to whittle it down ourselves."

But how? And where should we begin?"

"I'll tell you how and where!" Biff had a sudden inspiration. "Remember that souvenir shop where I bought these goggles? They might be watching for us to show up there again."

"But nobody spotted you buying the goggles," Uncle Charlie objected. "We were dodging everybody then. Remember?"

"But you had me take off the glasses at the station," reminded Biff, "as well as a few other places, to see how people reacted. Mr. Scowly's spies must have sent word telling him that we went up the Jungfrau and that I wore goggles in between times—"

"So he would naturally try to learn where you bought them," put in Uncle Charlie. "He will be looking for any new lead."

"And we can give him a dandy," supplied Biff. "There was a stamp and coin counter in that souvenir shop. What if we show the fifty-dollar gold piece to the shopkeeper and ask what he thinks of it?"

Charles Keene gave a low, soft whistle, a habit of his whenever anyone furnished him with a really good idea.

"Come on," he said. "We'll go in together, Biff, and let Tim watch the outside. He's good at that."

In the souvenir shop, they showed the fifty-dollar gold piece to the proprietor, and his eyes went as big as Biff's goggles.

"A rare coin indeed!" he exclaimed. "Worth a few

thousand dollars at least—if it is genuine.”

Biff stared incredulously.

“You mean it could be a counterfeit?”

“Who knows?” The shopkeeper smiled and added, “Nobody but an expert—and I am no expert. But it looks genuine enough.”

“Would it be classed as a collector’s item?” asked Charles Keene. “So we could take it back to the United States? There’s a restriction, you know, on importing gold coins, unless they are true rarities, wanted by collectors only.”

Again, the shopkeeper shrugged to show that he didn’t know. So Biff and Uncle Charlie left and took a roundabout way through little side streets and hotel lobbies. Once sure that they had shaken off any followers, they rejoined Tim only a block from the souvenir shop. Tim was brimming with news.

“I saw our man again!” he exclaimed. “He limped into the shop, scowl and all. Somebody must have seen you there.”

“Has he gone now?” asked Charles Keene.

Tim nodded, and Uncle Charlie formulated a quick plan. He handed Tim the checks for some baggage they had left at their hotel, before starting up the Jungfrau.

“You have the baggage ready,” Charles Keene told Tim. “Biff and I will join you after we lay our trail.”

Uncle Charlie and Biff went back into the souvenir shop, where the proprietor was actually startled to see

them return so soon. Charles Keene spoke to the shop owner in a convincing tone:

“I forgot to tell you that we expected to meet a man here. He’s a dark-complexioned chap, who looks at you like this”—Charles Keene gave an excellent imitation of the scowling man’s sharp stare—“and he was interested in buying the coin we showed you. We told him we were going to bring it here to learn its value. So if he stops by, please tell him that we asked for him but couldn’t wait.”

“Your friend has already been here and gone,” said the shopkeeper. “He asked about you and when I mentioned the coin, he was very interested. He is probably trying to find you now.”

“Didn’t he say where we could reach him?”

“Not here in Interlaken. He gave me his card”—the shopkeeper produced it as he spoke—“and you can see why he is interested in rare coins. He is Pierre Renault, a jeweler with offices in Paris and New York. Didn’t he tell you that, sir?”

“No, he didn’t.” Charles Keene smiled as he studied Renault’s card and returned it to the shopkeeper. “But I’m not surprised. Well, we can look up Mr. Renault in Paris.”

With that, Charles Keene bowed out of the shop and took Biff to the garage where they had previously rented a car. There he inquired about routes to Mondeau, the resort where the Chess Congress was to meet. Charles Keene also asked about inns along the

way and showed special interest in one called the Grand Châlet, near a popular tourist attraction known as the Silver Gorge.

Uncle Charlie then rented a car, and soon he and Biff picked up Tim with the baggage. As they were driving out of Interlaken, Charles Keene explained why he was interested in the Grand Châlet.

"The moment they mentioned the Silver Gorge," he declared, "I remembered that it's on an important railroad line and that most of the through trains stop there. So we'll check in separately at the Châlet, and tomorrow morning, Tim can go his own way through Switzerland, posing as you, Biff. After that, I'll take Biff along to Mondeau, where he will pose as you, Tim."

Biff grinned at that; then commented:

"I'll be all right until the chess players begin showing up. But what will you do, Uncle Charlie? Pass as Tim's manager?"

"That's right," nodded Charles Keene. "If the real Bert Shelby shows up, I can probably explain things."

"He won't get there before I do," declared Tim, "because he has to travel along with the group. So it will work out fine."

"In the meantime," Charles Keene reminded the boys, "we must keep our eyes open, particularly this evening, in case Monsieur Renault catches up with us. Now that we know him by name as well as appearance, I left a few leads for him in Interlaken, so he can show his hand if he wants. But I doubt that he

will overtake us between here and Mondeau.”

Swiss highways, it seemed, had their ups and downs like funiculars and aerial cable lines. They found that out as they drove through mountain passes, over ridges and around hairpin turns. There were tunnels, too, and frequently the trip became as harrowing as an aerial chair lift, but by now, Tim was getting over such worries.

However, it all demanded careful driving on Uncle Charlie’s part and it took much longer than he expected to reach the Grand Châlet. Dusk was already settling, and Uncle Charlie was steeling himself for some night driving on unfamiliar roads, when they came to a fork where one highway sloped down to Silver Gorge and the other ascended to the Châlet. They took the latter and soon swung in beside a building that was grand indeed.

In architecture, it resembled a Swiss Châlet, or mountain cottage, but everything was on a huge scale. Seen from the front, the building was three stories high and very wide; and when they left the car and entered the place, they found it was built on a slope, with another floor below. They went down a broad staircase to a dining room, where they were just in time for dinner, as it was near the closing hour.

It had been a long, tiring day, and Charles Keene wanted to make an early start in the morning, so they turned in soon after dinner. Biff’s room was large, with a double bed and a pair of full-length French windows

that opened out onto a balcony with a white rail that he could just see in the darkness. The night was chilly and the room had plenty of air, so rather than run the risk of any prowlers, Biff clamped the French windows tight shut.

Biff also locked and bolted the door of the room. Remembering his most valuable possession, the rare fifty-dollar gold piece, Biff brought it from his coat pocket, to make sure he still had it. Then, to avoid any worry over his prize during the night, he thrust the big gold coin under one of his pillows, rolled into bed and turned out the light.

Soon Biff was asleep, but he didn't slumber soundly. He began dreaming of the train going up the Jungfrau; then he dreamed he was in the car, with Uncle Charlie grimly swinging it around hairpin turns. Finally, half-waking, he realized exactly where he was, in a comfortable bed in the Grand Châlet.

There, within reach of his hand, lay the big gold coin, which must have worked out from beneath the pillow. It gleamed in the light from a rising moon, which was somewhat wavering because of a clouded sky. Biff was about to reach for the big round coin and thrust it back beneath his pillow, when a double thought flashed through his mind and fully wakened him.

A big round coin!

His gold piece was big, but not that big; and it wasn't round like most coins, it was octagonal!

That golden circle glowing beside the pillow wasn't a coin at all; it was the glare from a bright but tiny flashlight, focused in the hand of an unseen intruder who had somehow maneuvered his way into this room!

CHAPTER VII

The Riddle Deepens

IT WAS odd how a sudden sense of danger could work two ways. Biff had experienced that when confronted by a deadly cobra in India. He had felt it again, when imprisoned in the tomb of an Egyptian Pharaoh. It had happened on other occasions, too.

You went numb for the moment; and though you wanted desperately to take some action, instead you did absolutely nothing. That, oddly enough, was the best possible thing to do.

By doing nothing, you avoided mistakes when they could mean disaster. You began thinking faster, gathering your wits and strength for the moment when they would be most needed. Then action would count.

All this crossed Biff's mind as the flashlight's glow glided like a living thing toward the loose pillow beside him. Other ideas were also hitting home. For one, the prowler must have been in the room for some

time, for he would logically have searched Biff's clothes before looking under a pillow. For another thing, the room was colder, and Biff could feel a slight breeze from the window, so he knew that the man must have entered by that route.

By thinking while he waited, Biff was sure which direction the man would turn if the pinch came. That direction would be back to the open window, his best way of escape.

Now a hand came into the light and flipped the pillow upward. Biff heard the man give a low, satisfied grunt as the gold coin glimmered into sight, small indeed compared to the flashlight's glowing beam. The hand was in the light again, and Biff noted that its fingers were thick and stubby.

Powerful fingers, but deft as well, the way they turned the coin over, while hidden eyes studied one side, then the other, and even the edge of the coin. Finally, the fingers dropped the coin and started to lower the pillow over it, only to hesitate as though the man wanted to examine the coin again.

Then Biff's tension reached the breaking point. His moment had arrived. Unquestionably, the man was taking Biff into consideration; in another few seconds, he would be flicking the light Biff's way, to see if he was really asleep. Faking would be risky on Biff's part, with a cool customer like this.

So Biff didn't wait. As the flashlight's beam came licking toward him, Biff launched himself straight for



Biff launched himself straight for the man behind the flashlight.

the man behind the flashlight, trying to catch him off balance. The man shot his hand upward, hoping to follow with a downswing, but that worked to Biff's advantage. It gave him just the needed time to ram his head squarely against the man's chest, toppling him backward. Then they both were rolling on the floor, for Biff's wild drive had carried him over the edge of the bed.

The man did what Biff expected. Scrambling to his feet, he sprang for the open windows. Knowing which direction he would go, Biff was after him, hoping to tackle him before he reached the balcony, but the man didn't linger long enough for that. He'd pocketed his flashlight, and all in the same action, he vaulted the rail and clambered hand under hand down the other side.

The straggly moonlight showed his face like a monkey's in a cage, and Biff recognized the scowling features of the man who called himself Pierre Renault!

Next, the man's hands were clamping the very edge of the balcony, outside the rail, and a moment later, they let go, as though Renault had dropped easily to the ground. Biff figured he could do even better and probably overtake Renault before he could limp away, or at least learn where he went. So Biff grabbed the rail to vault it, intending to twist about and drop in one quick move.

Right then, another figure shot in from the side of the balcony and grabbed Biff in a frantic clutch. A

forearm came up beneath Biff's chin, half choking him, so he delivered a hard elbow jab to his attacker's ribs, hoping to shake him off. Instead, he clung more frantically than ever, his voice coming in gasps that were punctuated by Biff's jabs:

"Biff—don't go—look below—Biff! Look below—"

Tim's voice! Biff recognized it just in time to heed it, as he was teetering on the rail. Until then, he'd thought that this attacker was one of Renault's helpers, but the fact that it was Tim completely changed the situation. Now, as the clouds suddenly cleared, the bright moonlight showed Biff why Tim had tried to hold him back.

Straight down from the balcony, Biff saw what he momentarily thought was reflected moonlight, only to realize that it was a silver ribbon weaving its course between sheer rocky walls. This was the Silver Gorge that attracted tourists and it brought them to the Grand Châlet as well.

From the balconies along this back wall of the Châlet, you could look right into the gorge, a thousand or more feet below, without even a ledge in the granite facing of the cliff to stop or delay whatever might fall. If Biff had completed his unthinking vault of the rail, he would have continued down to nothingness. His body, by now, would be somewhere in that surging stream far below.

Biff's hands, right then, went so limp that he still might have toppled from the rail if Tim hadn't

clutched him and yanked him back to the balance point. Biff took a deep breath, then leaned over the rail more cautiously and saw where Renault must have gone. There was another balcony below this one, just as there was still another, just above.

If Renault had clambered up from below, it was a daring feat on his part. Probably, rather than risk the climb, he had dropped from the balcony above by hanging and swinging inward. Quite as nervy, but much easier; and it would explain Renault's swift departure. He had simply duplicated his earlier swing, to land on the balcony below Biff's!

A bit shaky, Biff thanked Tim for his well-timed help. Still panting slightly, Tim furnished some further facts. In his room next to Biff's, Tim had left his windows open, hoping to enjoy the Alpine air. Still he had not been able to go to sleep.

"I was lying there awake," declared Tim, "when I heard peculiar scraping sounds out on the balcony. But when I looked, there was nothing there. Your windows were open—"

"Wait now," put in Biff. "Let's look at them."

They looked and found what Biff expected. The window clamp was bent, indicating that it had been jimmied open, evidently by an expert hand.

"Renault's work," decided Biff. "He seems to be capable of anything short of murder, and maybe he could be blamed for that if I'd followed him over the rail. I'd never have grabbed that lower balcony. I didn't

even know it was there.”

“That’s what I figured,” declared Tim. “You see, I went out on the balcony and looked around. I peeked over the rail just enough to notice there was one below. Then, all of a sudden, bang! Renault came popping out of your window and went over the rail. I didn’t look to see him swing, because you were piling after him, Biff, and I had to stop you.”

“Which you did,” said Biff, “and thanks again. But since Renault probably won’t be back, and nobody else is awake, let’s get what sleep we still can, before Uncle Charlie calls us.”

What sleep the boys did get was fitful. Charles Keene rang their rooms early and during breakfast, they told him all that had happened. Uncle Charlie took most of the blame on himself.

“If I hadn’t planted so many leads in Interlaken,” declared Charles Keene, “Renault wouldn’t have been on our trail so soon. What with the souvenir shop, the hotel and the car rental agency, he had a lot to go on. Anyway, we’re sure of two things: He wanted to know, more about that gold coin, and he’s the big man in whatever is going on, with plenty of people working for him.”

Biff and Uncle Charlie left the Grand Châlet quite openly, but they took Tim’s bag with them, while he sneaked out the side way and waited for them up the road. They picked Tim up in the car and drove down to the fork, then doubled back along the lower road to

reach the station in Silver Gorge just before his train came in. There, Tim went his way alone, after a heartfelt handshake from Biff.

Biff and Uncle Charlie continued driving. The road veered from the gorge, but Biff managed to gain a distant view of the Grand Châlet perched on the brink of the thousand-foot cliff that he had so narrowly avoided. Later, memories of that near-plunge gave Biff the shivers, even when new dangers loomed. Charles Keene had taken a good but narrow road which had a particular disadvantage.

By Swiss road law, when two cars met on a grade, the one coming down was forced to back up. By an odd quirk of fate, Uncle Charlie was always meeting cars that were coming up. On three different occasions, when they were backing around hairpin turns, Biff gulped when he realized that a few feet more would topple them over a brink much higher than Silver Gorge. But always, Uncle Charlie braked short of those last few feet.

It was late afternoon when they drove into the broad but secluded mountain valley where the great resort of Mondeau was under construction on a great natural terrace a few thousand feet above the picturesque town of Hautburg. A new teleferic cableway, with two large cars of thirty-person capacity, ran from Hautburg up to Mondeau, but Uncle Charlie drove on to a Lower Station, where he left the car in a garage and they rode up to Mondeau

on an old funicular railway.

Biff was eager to see the new hotel, but his Uncle Charlie was more interested in a telecabin lift that extended up the mountainside above.

“Look at that, Biff!” Uncle Charlie enthused. “It goes up over the Red Ledge to a mountain village called Altamont, and they are extending it to Mondeau Peak, another two thousand feet above. This is the kind of project I’d like to line up for duplication in America. We’ll check into this tomorrow.”

“Meanwhile, we’d better check into the hotel,” Biff reminded him, “as Tim Larkin and his manager, Bert Shelby. Remember?”

“I remember.”

Checking in at the new Hotel Mondeau proved easy, because the rooms had already been signed up and allocated. What was still better, clippings from Berne newspapers were posted on a big bulletin board that carried announcements and other notes regarding the coming Chess Congress. The clerk behind the desk glanced at Biff, then at the clippings which showed Biff as Tim Larkin. With a smile, he looked back at Biff again and then bowed to Charles Keene and said, “Welcome, Mr. Shelby.”

So far, guests were so few at the new hotel that Biff and Uncle Charlie practically had the place to themselves, and there was no difficulty in continuing the parts that they were playing. But late that night, as Biff gazed from the window of his room and studied

the tiny lights of Hautburg twinkling in the valley far below, he wondered where this strange sequence of events would lead.

Whatever the riddle, of one thing Biff was sure. He had the answer in his own pocket, in the form of a fifty-dollar gold piece that some people regarded as highly important, yet still were willing to let Biff keep as long as they supposed him to be Tim Larkin.

Odd, how an effort to answer one riddle could bring up a half a dozen others!

CHAPTER VIII

Avalanche!

THE next morning Biff looked eagerly from his window expecting to see a panorama of surrounding mountain peaks with a vast valley yawning below. Instead, all he saw were snowflakes, millions of them, drifting down from a gray, sullen sky. Mondeau was in the grip of a surprise blizzard, the first snowfall of this season.

At breakfast, the hotel personnel were as glum as the weather. They grumbled that here was an early winter, perhaps the earliest ever in these parts, and the resort wasn't ready for it. There was a fine hotel, half-finished, but no lodges or smaller hotels in outlying portions of this magnificent pleasure area.

That, however, could be treated with a shrug, since there was no way to reach such places. There was a funicular railway, yes, and the combination of a teleferic cableway and telecabin line connecting Hautburg and Altamont. But Mondeau was just a stop or junction point between. Nobody came there except the hired help who worked at the hotel.

No ski slopes, no bobsled runs, no ice rink. All those things were planned, along with lifts to take people there. Maybe, next year, Mondeau would have them,

or maybe the year after that. Who knew? Who cared? Nobody, apparently. That was why Mondeau had nothing better on its schedule than the coming Chess Congress and a few stupid conventions to be held by people who preferred to remain indoors.

Charles Keene became somewhat moody himself as he listened to such talk. He was strictly an outdoor man and he had hoped to spend the next week or so driving throughout the surrounding district, studying other forms of mountain transportation. The swirling blizzard prevented that, and if it continued, people would be snowbound in the hotel for days to come.

Back in the hotel room, Uncle Charlie brought out the notes that he had already taken and as he spread them out, he again became his enthusiastic self. Biff, meanwhile, was pondering over a chess board, working out some smart moves in case he had to perform publicly as Tim Larkin. Biff wondered just how far he could get with that.

“Forget those chess problems,” Uncle Charlie interrupted, “and look at this.” He began spreading photographs over a big table. “These are pictures of valley towns and cities in the United States. See the hills, with nothing on them, all ignored and undeveloped? Now look at this.”

Deftly, Charles Keene matched the American pictures with those of Swiss mountain areas, with their mountain railways, lifts, and little towns and settlements perched everywhere. It was easy for Biff to

visualize one in terms of the other. He realized that Uncle Charlie might indeed make a fortune by transplanting Swiss transportation methods to the United States and increasing the value of idle real estate.

After dinner, Biff discovered an elaborate display in an obscure corner of the spacious hotel lobby. It was a model of the Mondeau area as it would some day be, with a dozen or more lifts of varied sizes. What amazed him was a tremendous teleferic line extending from Altamont to Mondeau Peak, high above, with a pair of cars, each two stories high. By comparison with other models, Biff was sure that they could hold a hundred passengers each.

Biff found Uncle Charlie and showed him the display. Enthusiastically, Uncle Charlie exclaimed:

“That’s the kind of transportation I’m looking for! I have costs and working plans on everything else, but nothing to match that. Let’s find out more about it.”

Charles Keene inquired at the hotel desk and was delighted to learn that surveys were already being made for the gigantic teleferic line, which was to be Mondeau’s main attraction.

“The experts are already on the ground,” the hotel clerk stated. “I’m sure they would be glad to tell you all about the project, Mr. Shelby.”

Uncle Charlie started to say, “The name is Keene—” but caught himself, remembering that he was posing as Tim Larkin’s manager, Bert Shelby. To cover his

confusion he looked about and asked:

"You mean the experts are here? Or up at Altamont?"

"Much higher than that," replied the clerk, with a smile. "They are working out of a special survey cabin on Mondeau Peak."

"How did they manage to establish themselves up there?"

"They were flown up, and so were the building materials and the workmen. Supplies are flown up there regularly and so are visitors. You can arrange a trip whenever the weather is right."

"It sounds like a regular airlift, with a parachute drop. How would we get back from there?"

"You go in a Piper Cub," explained the clerk, with a still broader smile, "and it picks you up later. It is piloted by Roy Tallard, who makes dozens of such flights every week. You will find him at the airfield near Dubonne, about thirty miles from here."

With that, Uncle Charlie's impatience returned. In the living room of the hotel suite, he alternately mulled over plans and glowered at the snow, which was still descending ghostlike in the outside blackness. At last, he calmed himself by playing a few games of chess with Biff. But at one point, he groaned:

"Just our luck to hear about Mondeau Peak the day a blizzard hits! If this storm keeps up, we may not get up there for another month. Maybe that survey crew will be holed in on Mondeau Peak until next spring!"

By morning, however, the entire scene had changed. The storm had died out during the night, and though all the surrounding mountains were completely snow-clad, there were great grassy patches throughout the valley, where the snow had turned to rain. Mondeau Peak stood out like a great white monolith, one of the tallest of the lot; and with a pair of binoculars, Biff could just make out a tiny black speck which he decided was the survey cabin.

It was lucky that they had left the car at the Lower Station, because the road down to the valley was blocked with snow. But the all-weather funicular was operating as usual. By noon, Biff and Uncle Charlie were well on their way, following a winding course through valleys where occasional mountains sprang straight up from the depths of placid lakes, which were still unfrozen, although most of the mountains were thick with snow.

The airfield was in a broad, level stretch of ground below the slope occupied by the quaint town of Dubonne. Roy Tallard proved to be a brisk, youthful man with a firm but friendly smile beneath his short-clipped mustache. He said that since the snow had let up, he intended to deliver mail and supplies to Mondeau Peak and would be glad to take along a couple of paying passengers.

During the conversation, Tallard mentioned that all trips were made directly between Dubonne and Mondeau Peak. None of the survey crew ever went to

Mondeau itself, nor did Tallard. That enabled Charles Keene to introduce himself by his right name, and his nephew, Biff Brewster. But before the take-off, Uncle Charlie still took measures to protect the double part that they were playing.

“It’s better that I stop off at the Peak alone,” he told Biff. “Then I can talk technicalities and nobody will have a chance to ask you any questions. You can go along with Tallard in the plane while he makes his rounds, so the crew at the Peak won’t even know we’re together. Then they can’t even begin to think in terms of the boy wonder, Tim Larkin, and his manager, Bert Shelby.”

Tallard willingly agreed to keep Biff in the plane with him, saying that he would enjoy his company and that he would have some interesting things to show him. They clambered into the little plane, which was fitted both with wheels and special skis which served as runners. They took off on the wheels, but once they were climbing up above the mountains, Tallard operated a lever that lowered the skis so they became the landing gear.

To Biff, the trip was truly fantastic. He had flown over many mountains and had made daring trips in Piper Cubs, but here were those elements in combination, with a breath-taking proximity. As it circled upward, the little craft headed straight toward rugged crags and jutting pinnacles, only to skim past them, or in some cases, almost bounce over them.

Due to the heavy, moist snow, many of the mountain folds were filled with huge whitened banks. Occasionally, Tallard pointed out peaks where the snow had piled up just as it might do on a roof edge. Some of those piles were immense and looked ready to topple. When Biff asked why they didn't, Tallard had a simple reply:

"They are slow to melt," he explained, "because there is no surrounding ground to reflect the heat. But you never can trust them. Sometimes they go sooner than you expect."

Noting how precarious the snow-capped summits appeared to be, Biff began to feel skittish about landing on Mondeau Peak. But that was routine for Tallard; what was more, the survey party had made due allowance for such landings. As the little plane skirted the Peak, Biff saw flags and markers showing on a flat, sheltered stretch of ground. It looked too small for a landing, but that didn't apply to this craft.

Tallard banked so far that the landing spot seemed to rush straight at the plane's wing; then, completing his circle, he touched with his skis, with the bulk of Mondeau Peak coming head on. There was just enough upward slant to halt the plane short of a simple but well-built cabin that had a strong concrete foundation. Then men in fur hats and heavy jackets came to receive the supplies. They shook hands with Charles Keene as he clambered from the plane. Tallard shouted an introduction from the pilot's seat.

No time was wasted on the take-off. The plane seemed as eager as a hummingbird to be on its way. Members of the survey crew twisted its tail about and the skis seemed to yank themselves from the soft snow as one wing almost brushed the cabin roof in passing. Then they were on their way again, and far below, Biff could see the new Mondeau Hotel on its vast shelf with the funicular train crawling up one slope and the tramways operating on another.

Tallard made a few more routine stops, each of which, to Biff, seemed a new and exciting adventure. Then, just as he was getting used to it, Tallard dipped the Cub down past a tremendous pinnacle that was topped by the heaviest snowbank of all. Next, the plane was almost beneath the whitened brow that loomed like some fanciful monster.

“Hold tight!” Tallard called. “We’re landing here below the Devil’s Tower!”

Land they did, at such a slant that Biff felt sure the Cub would either topple onto its lower wing or do a sideslip from the precarious ledge on which they perched. But Tallard had allowed for the traction of the snow, and his upper ski sank deeper than the lower to provide a counterbalance. Tallard anchored it still more by clambering out on the upper side and beckoning for Biff to do the same, and their weight became a stabilizing factor.

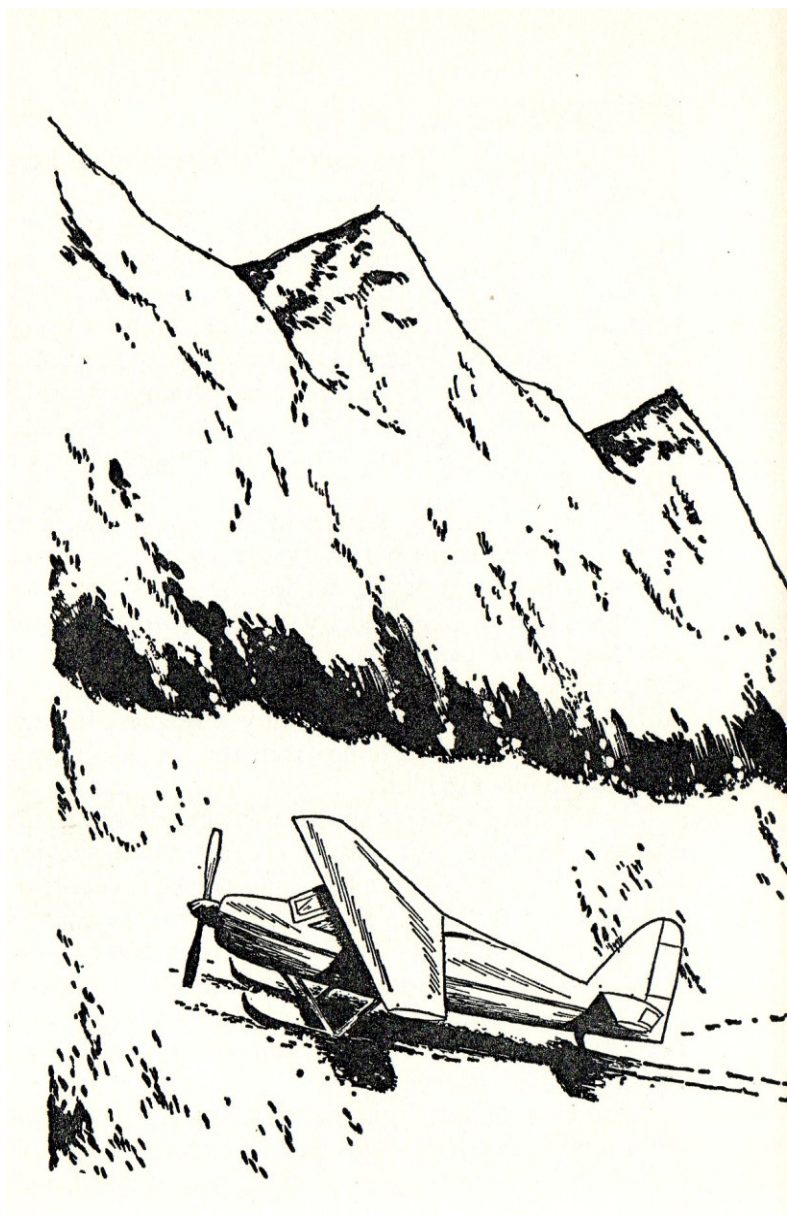
At that, the landing seemed utterly foolhardy. The plane itself had seemed remarkably secure compared

to this wind-swept ledge, where the snow, itself an uncertain factor, provided the only security, as their feet sank ankle deep. But contrasting with that was the fearful menace of that towering bank above. As Biff looked up, he was gripped by a helpless feeling, for the snow that overhung from the Devil's Tower was mountainous in itself.

Then Tallard's purpose became plain. He had come around the plane and was working toward the icy brink of the ledge, where he made sure of his footing, then pointed down the slope that seemed to expand below. Biff cautiously inched his way toward the edge until he saw what Tallard indicated, a group of a dozen mountain climbers working their way up a crude path amid the rocky patches that jutted from the snow-filled fissures.

"The crazy fools!" snapped Tallard. "There is always a new crop every season, ready to make a climb before the first snow comes along. Then, when it does come, they try it anyway, thinking it will be all the greater sport. Only it isn't. It's just an added risk, that's all."

Tallard raised his gloved hands to his lips and gave a long, yodeling call. As the climbers looked up from below, Tallard gestured to the massive bank of snow that capped the Devil's Tower. Then he gave his hands a hard, downward thrust, motioning them to go back. For the first time, the climbers must have recognized



the full menace of that overhanging brow of whiteness. They hesitated and studied it from the fairly level stretch of path that they had just attained.

Then, as Tallard repeated his emphatic gesture, they waved back as though they understood. Reluctantly, they turned to begin the descent. They had come close enough to the Tower to realize that they could never make a summit so top-heavy with snow. They were sorry now that they had come this far. Biff felt relieved to see them turning back, but as he studied their pygmy figures, a few hundred feet below, a sudden chill seized him.



It wasn't just Biff's imagination. At the same instant, Tallard exclaimed, "Feel that cold closing in on us? I've sensed that sort of thing before. Let's go, before the snow gives way."

Tallard paused as he passed in back of the plane, just long enough to swing the tail at a sharper angle. Then Biff climbed into his seat, and a moment later, Tallard was taking his place at the controls. Yet somehow, with the take-off almost due, Biff felt the chill increase.

He looked up instinctively for the answer and saw it instantly. The entire mass of snow was moving forward, downward, casting its chill ahead of it, as it toppled, hurling its crushing, overwhelming tonnage down the mountainside. The billow of whiteness was so huge that it threw a shadow of blackness ahead of it, enveloping the tiny plane in its tremendous maw.

Despite himself, Biff gave a hoarse, hopeless shout, as he recognized that in a matter of mere seconds, he, Tallard and the plane would be engulfed forever!

CHAPTER IX

Otho to the Rescue

EVEN if Roy Tallard had heeded Biff's shout, he would have had only a few seconds to look up before the white wall crashed. Already, the plane was canting sideways as though its own snowbank had been yanked from under it and it seemed to take an odd jounce upward to meet the descending mass.

For one horrendous moment, the sunlight was almost entirely blotted out and Biff thought, "This is it." Then the uptilted wing was skimming past the hurtling rim of solid whiteness and the plane emerged from a spume of loose-flung snow into dazzling brilliance.

Only then did Biff realize that Tallard had been taking off at the moment when the slide occurred, so that part of the plane's wild, sideward motion had been its own. The yielding of the snowbank underneath had given it more impetus and aided its clearance. The only bad part was the crazy jounce that

might have wrecked another plane during a take-off, but the Piper Cub was used to things like that and had functioned in its customary style.

So they were climbing up into the sunlight and just below, Biff could see what seemed the whole top of the Devil's Tower coasting down beneath them. It was billowy at the fringes, where the loose snow kicked up in tremendous flurries like the one the plane had just come through. But otherwise, it resembled a gigantic block of solid marble, sliding down an incline from its quarry.

Biff stared amazed as the plane circled higher and outward, for the gradual way in which the avalanche gathered speed was an indication of its mighty power. Then the great white cake began to crack, as it hit obstacles. Some were jagged rocks that altered its appearance but did not lessen its power, for it rode right over them, carrying some along. Other obstructions were huge snowbanks, which it gathered into its fold, adding to its titanic size.

But it was becoming a mammoth surge as well as a slide, as it reached the more gradual portion of the slope which spread outward like a great apron. The plane was hovering above that section now, and almost directly below, Biff could see the figures of the mountain climbers frantically seeking refuge among the lesser crags. That, however, had become hopeless.

By gathering everything in its path, the snowy avalanche was huge enough to cover whatever it

encountered. The tiny human figures disappeared beneath its sweeping billows and as the powdery snow settled, it became a great stretch of sheer whiteness, covering mighty juts of rock as well as the hapless, insignificant human beings. All in a matter of seconds, the entire party was engulfed and completely snowed under, just as Biff had feared the plane would be, only a few minutes before.

The plane was still hovering high, for Tallard was maintaining altitude in order to gain a broad perspective of the scene and learn if possible where any of the climbers had been carried by the snowy tide. Biff shouted suddenly as he saw a stir in the expanse of glistening white; then, like an ant emerging from the loose earth of a caved-in anthill, a blackish form crawled into sight and could be identified as the head and shoulders of a man.

Tallard, too, had spotted him and was moving in that direction as another blob of blackness squirmed up through the snowy waste and a second survivor appeared. Both managed to pull themselves from the loose snow and it was apparent that neither was badly hurt, for they were rising to look around for the others. But since the two were perhaps a hundred feet apart, it would be difficult for them to spot the rest.

That was Tallard's job. When he saw another human insect working to the snow's surface a few hundred feet down the slope, he brought the plane directly above and reached out to point downward.

Promptly, the first two men went to the aid of the third as fast as they could pull themselves through the snow. Meanwhile, Tallard was scanning the whitened banks for more.

Yet not another came in sight. Only three had shown up of the entire dozen. Grimly, Biff realized that they were probably all alive, struggling against the suffocating snow, yet unable to pull themselves up through the mass that weighed them down. A few feet, perhaps even inches could bring them to safety, but none were making it, and the numbing effect of the snow would rapidly lessen their efforts.

If only he could get down there to help! Despite the huge area and the difficulties offered by the snow itself, he might stumble upon at least one more person and add a fourth survivor to the list. But just as he was about to shout to Tallard, the pilot ended his circling tactics and put the Piper Cub into rapid flight directly away from the scene.

Biff could hardly believe it. To desert the victims of the disaster! What if a few more finally managed to reach the snowy surface, maybe enough to poke a hand in sight and wave for help? Who would be able to sight that last desperate gesture? Only Tallard, and now he was gone!

What was more, he seemed to have abandoned the cause entirely for he was passing other peaks and was zooming the plane down into a deep valley, where Biff saw the town of Hautburg stretched out ahead. Where

and why Tallard intended to land, Biff couldn't guess, but he would need to use his wheels instead of his landing skis.

Or so Biff thought, until the plane took a sudden veer toward a mountainside a few miles short of the town. There, in mere minutes after leaving the Devil's Tower, Tallard shot the plane to a surprise landing at the bottom of a ski slope. The plane stopped directly in back of a fair-sized farmhouse where two children, a boy and a girl, were playing in the yard.

Neither was surprised at the sudden arrival of the Piper Cub, but Tallard jarred them from their calm by rising from the pilot's seat and shouting at them:

"Hurry and tell Junius that I want him right away! And tell him to bring Otho!"

The children did not have to convey that message. At that moment, the back door of the cottage burst open and a brown-haired boy about Biff's age came dashing out, sliding his arms into the sleeves of a jacket. All in one move, he snatched up a pair of skis outside the door and waved back to the house, where a medium-sized shepherd dog bounded into sight.

They both reached the plane and hopped aboard, the boy helping the dog with a quick boost and planting his skis at an angle between the seats. Even before the two were settled, Tallard was gunning the motor for another take-off. The Piper Cub circled rapidly and headed on a beeline back toward the Devil's Tower.

Tallard didn't have to tell Biff that the boy's name was Junius and that the dog was called Otho. The reason why Tallard had raced to get them was explained a few minutes later, when he made another daring landing on the high, steep slope where three members of the mountain-climbing party were still groping blindly for the rest.

They had tramped down a fair-sized patch of snow, but it was nothing compared to the ground that Otho covered, soon after he bounded from the plane. The highly trained shepherd dog knew exactly what he was to do. With uncanny sense, he picked a sector where he circled with his nose close to the snow; finally, he stopped and began to paw frantically.

By then, Junius had put on his skis and was there to help. Junius waved for the men to join him and by the time they did, he was pulling another member of the party from the snow. Otho, however, was no longer near. He was racing madly to find other buried victims.

Even while they were reviving the fourth man, Otho had found a fifth and then a sixth, with Junius following in his wake. Those two were so numbed that the only thing to do was to put them in the plane, so that Tallard could fly them to a hospital. That was done and the search went on, with Otho covering a still wider range and Junius coming up each time he



*Biff and the others plowed their way through the snow
to pull out a victim.*

made another human find. Then the others, Biff among them, would plow their way through the snow to pull out a victim, who could still be revived.

By that time, Otho and Junius were off on a new quest, while Tallard was returning and making another of his daredevil landings as part of his shuttle service to and from the hospital. This kept on, until every one of the dozen mountain climbers had been found and rescued alive.

Tallard then shuttled the first members of the group to the hospital so they could look after the rest. That left Biff alone with Junius and Otho, waiting for Tallard to return. For the first time, the two boys had a chance to exchange real greetings in the form of genuine smiles. Then they both began to laugh, happily thankful that the grim job was over, and that it had worked out so successfully.

The real hero of the occasion, Otho, did not join in the laugh. Naturally, Otho couldn't, since dogs don't laugh. But dogs can whine and Otho did, as he turned and stared toward the summit of Devil's Tower. Immediately, Junius became serious. Anxiously, he scanned the sky.

"I hope," he said, "that Mr. Tallard will come back soon."

Biff put the prompt query: "Because of Otho?"

"That's right," Junius acknowledged. "Otho knows when snow is coming. That is why he is so good at finding his way through it. When he whines, there will

be more snow and plenty of it.”

“Was that why you were waiting and ready today?”

“Yes. Otho had been whining—the way he is now—and I knew that an avalanche was coming somewhere.”

“You mean you knew what was happening up here?”

“No, no.” Junius shook his head emphatically. “I just knew that Otho smelled the snow, as he does now.”

“Then another slide may come at any moment?”

“You never can tell. It would be better if we had some safer place to wait, like a high rock.”

Unfortunately, there was no such rock close by. The tremendous snow slide had buried everything completely, leaving jutting crags and great stretches of bare rock up toward the summit, but none this far down the slope. Getting up to the summit would be hopeless now, with so much snow to wade through. So the boys could only wait while Otho’s whines increased.

“You should have trained Otho to find buried rocks the way he finds buried people,” Biff suggested. “Then he would be a big help in a spot like this.”

Junius managed to grin at Biff’s effort to ease the tension. Then both their faces froze as Otho gave a loud yelp and bounded up the slope. The boys strained their ears, expecting to hear the first rumbles of another avalanche. Instead, they caught a droning sound from off beyond the summit. Otho’s yelps became happier and turned into welcoming barks.

Roy Tallard was returning in the Piper Cub to pick up his last load of passengers. Otho's whines had been induced by the fear that he and the boys had been forgotten; nothing more.

CHAPTER X

The Man from the Past

TALLARD made one of his perfect ski landings and as the boys climbed into the plane with Otho, the pilot told them that everyone was recuperating nicely in the hospital. Then came another thrilling take-off and the little plane was winging full tilt back to the house where Junius lived. When they landed there, Tallard looked at Biff and suggested:

“Maybe you’d better stay here with Junius while I bring your uncle in from Mondeau Peak. You look like you could do with a little recuperation yourself.”

Biff gave a slightly sick grin and admitted that the pilot was right. Now that the ordeal was over, Biff realized how fearful it all had been: The hairbreadth escape from the avalanche, the horror of watching the climbers vanish beneath its folds, the mad flight from the scene, the return with Junius and Otho that had resulted in a complete but frantic rescue.

No wonder tension had been at the breaking point while Biff and Junius waited for Tallard to come and

finally pick them up. But that didn't account for the shaky action of Biff's legs as he tried to get out of the plane right now. Biff would have fallen if Junius hadn't been there to grab him and as Biff tried to straighten up, everything whirled about him.

Here, in the safety of the farmyard, Biff was gripped by that same overwhelming blackness that had come with the tottering of the towering snowbank, only now it didn't turn to dazzling light. Instead, the blackout was complete, though Biff gradually sensed that he was emerging from it. He could hear voices, though he didn't understand them. Then he opened his eyes and saw faces: those of Junius and Tallard.

Now Biff realized that Tallard must have hopped from the plane and helped Junius get him into the house. Biff was now lying on a couch in a quaintly furnished room, and though the place began to swim when he closed his eyes, it steadied the moment he opened them again.

"It's kind of silly," Biff said weakly, "passing out like that."

"No, it isn't." Tallard shook his head. "Your trouble was too much exertion at that high altitude. It's bad enough making plane hops from low valleys to mountain peaks, but the way you were galloping about like a chamois was just too much."

"I guess everyone else was used to the altitude," conceded Biff. "The mountain climbers certainly were. I should have taken it easier instead of trying to keep

up with Junius and Otho.”

At Biff’s mention of Otho, the dog himself suddenly bounded up from the floor and planted his paws on the couch while he stretched his head forward and began to lick Biff’s face.

“That’s Otho for you,” laughed Junius. “Always trying to act like a St. Bernard.”

Biff sat up, interested, and began stroking Otho’s head as he inquired:

“You mean that St. Bernard dogs lick people’s faces when they find them in the snow?”

“They do that,” acknowledged Junius, “to bring travelers out of a ‘snow sleep,’ as they call it. They get drowsy as they go along and once they give way to it, they can say good-bye—”

“And I’m saying good-bye right now,” put in Tallard, “before the snow sleep catches up with me or a *fohn* comes up.”

As Tallard left, Biff asked Junius what the word *fohn* meant and the Swiss boy explained that it was fierce southern wind of short duration, but very treacherous.

“A *fohn* can loosen the snow and start those slides,” declared Junius. “A *fohn* can make it bumpy for Mr. Tallard’s Cub plane, too. St. Bernards know when a *fohn* is coming, just as they can tell when there may be an avalanche. I guess that maybe Otho does have some St. Bernard in him.”

Biff thought Otho looked much more like a collie, but he didn’t say so. Instead, he listened, fascinated,

while Junius continued to talk about St. Bernards. According to Junius, the big dogs could practically paddle their way through snow, and when they scented a buried person, they would not only dig him out themselves, but one of the big dogs would huddle close to the victim and keep him warm until help arrived.

“Otho can’t come up to all that,” admitted Junius, “but he’s a good avalanche dog, the way he finds people in the snow, as you saw. That’s why I always have him ready when Mr. Tallard comes here for him. Other persons often use him, too.”

Conversation was interrupted by the two children whom Biff had seen earlier. They appeared from the kitchen bringing huge cups of hot chocolate for Biff and Junius, who introduced them as his brother August and his sister Claudia. Though August was nearly two years younger than Claudia, they were about the same size and looked very much alike, reminding Biff of his own brother and sister, Ted and Monica, who were twins.

Biff was about to mention that when he caught himself, remembering that he would still be playing the part of Tim Larkin when he went back to the hotel. Hautburg was very close to Mondeau, and Junius just might hear something about the boy chess wizard who was going to play in the international tournament.

So far, Junius hadn’t learned Biff’s last name, for Tallard had introduced him only as “Biff.” So it was

best to let it go at that, and let Junius talk about himself and his own family. Junius did, and Biff learned that their family name was Croz. Junius's father was an officer in the Swiss Army and was away on maneuvers.

"What do you do," asked Biff, "between the times when Mr. Tallard or somebody else may need you and Otto?"

"You saw the ski slope near here," reminded Junius. "It's almost in our back yard, so I practice there, whenever it is in shape. The rest of the time, I learn watchmaking."

"Watchmaking? Here at home?"

"Yes, from my Grandfather Croz. Now that you're feeling better, come along and I'll introduce you to him."

They had finished their hot chocolate and when Biff came to his feet, his legs were no longer wobbly. Junius knocked at a door in a corner of the hallway and when a voice responded, he opened it and went in to a tidy, compact workshop that looked like a special addition to the farmhouse.

There, at a bench with dozens of small trays containing tiny parts and a rack of special tools and implements, sat an elderly, white-haired man, with a jeweler's lens affixed to one eye as he studied the mechanism of a little watch. His long, thin fingers moved deftly as he laid aside one tool and took another to make an adjustment. While he worked, he

talked with Junius in a language that was truly puzzling to Biff, for two odd reasons.

First, much of it was different from any language that Biff had ever before heard, let alone any that he actually knew. Second, what words he did recognize sounded like samples of various declensions that Biff had learned in his Latin class at Harley.

“My grandfather extends greetings,” Junius told Biff, “and offers apologies. He speaks only Romansch, so I must translate it for you.”

Biff learned quite a few things about fine watchmaking during the next half hour, with old Mr. Croz explaining the points and Junius translating them. There was another workbench in the room, fitted with a similar array of tools, which Junius proudly acknowledged was the one he used when he worked here with his grandfather.

After they said good-bye to Mr. Croz and left the workshop, Junius told Biff that old-time watchmakers were much in demand by big watch manufacturers, but that they found it hard to get them.

“The bigger factories provide special rooms,” declared Junius, “with only two men to each, because the old-time watchmakers feel that three is a crowd.” Junius smiled at his own quip, but his tone was serious as he continued: “Still, some old-timers won’t go to big cities like Geneva. They prefer to work in smaller factories in little towns like Hautburg, as my grandfather once did.

“Still others would rather work at home, as my grandfather does now. So almost any house that you see along the road may have a watchmaker’s shop, though they are now getting rather hard to find. Anyway, it is a trade that seems to go on and on, and that is why I’m taking it up myself.”

With that, Junius switched from the subject of watchmaking to that of languages. He said that his grandfather knew other languages besides Romansch, but preferred to speak it because he regarded it as the Swiss national language. Some of the Romansch expressions, so Junius said, dated back to the Latin of the Roman Empire.

“I learned Romansch to please my grandfather,” declared Junius, “but French, German, and Italian are the official languages of Switzerland. Everybody is supposed to know two, and it’s better to know three. If you want to get around and talk to everybody you meet, such as tourists, you have to learn English, too. I did.”

Biff was impressed by Junius’s linguistic ability, so began to improve his own by asking questions and having Junius answer them in different languages. They were still at it when Charles Keene arrived in his rented car and picked up Biff, who simply introduced him to Junius as his uncle.

Tallard had taken Uncle Charlie from Mondeau Peak to Dubonne by plane, and Uncle Charlie had driven in from there. Now, since they were so near

Hautburg, Uncle Charlie decided to go up to the hotel on the teleferic cableway. He put the automobile in a garage near the station, and soon he and Biff were boarding the thirty-passenger car that was waiting at the bottom of the aerial tramway.

It was late afternoon, now, and workers were on their way home from Hautburg to Altamont by way of Mondeau. The car filled rapidly, leaving other persons waiting on the platform as it started its upward trip. Looking ahead, Biff could see the companion car gliding downward on the other cable from its station far up on the great shelf where the Hotel Mondeau Was situated.

Though dusk was settling, the snow still had a whitish glint and Biff had to blink a few times to adjust his vision to the darker interior of the crowded teleferic car. The result was that when he looked at the faces of the passengers, they appeared somewhat shadowy.

But for that, Biff wouldn't have recognized the face of a big man who was seated well up ahead, for the man was clean-shaven, while the last time Biff had seen him, he had been wearing a black beard. But the brief blur of Biff's vision made up for the present lack.

In that fleeting instant, Biff Brewster recognized the burly, bearish man from Berne, who had so mysteriously given him the rare gold coin that even now was still in Biff's pocket!

CHAPTER XI

The Trail That Failed

AS THE aerial tram glided steadily upward, Biff forgot all about the passing scene as he waited tensely for a chance to nudge his Uncle Charlie without being noticed by the man up ahead. The car was rising above huge gullies, covering breath-taking stretches between the great steel pillars over which the cable ran, but Biff's mind was far away, back at the Clock Tower in Berne.

At last Biff's moment came:

"Look, Uncle Charlie—there he is—the man with the black beard and the red jacket—"

It was Biff's poke that roused Charles Keene, whose mind was even farther away. His thoughts were back in America, for he was calculating the profits of this ride in terms of dollars and cents, rather than Swiss francs. Uncle Charlie was picturing these riders as American workers on their way home to a newly built suburb instead of the natives of a Swiss mountain

town.

“Who—what did you say?” sputtered Uncle Charlie. “I don’t see any black beard—or red jacket!”

Fortunately, there was enough conversation going on to drown that exclamation. Besides, most of the speakers were using languages other than English, so they mightn’t have understood Charles Keene if they’d heard him. Now, Biff’s undertone came sharp and emphatic, but low in his uncle’s ear:

“I mean the man who was wearing them both—black beard and red jacket—back when he gave me that lucky coin—the fifty-dollar gold piece!”

By now, the illusion had completely faded. The car, after clicking past an overhead support, came above a wooded ridge where a burst of late sunlight flooded the windows. If Biff had first noticed the man right now, he wouldn’t have seen a vestige of resemblance to the bearded, red-jacketed man whom he had recalled so vividly.

Even his manner was different. His gestures were sweeping, smooth as he talked to a friend beside him; not clumsy and abrupt as they had been before. Biff expected his Uncle Charlie to say as much, but instead, he went along with Biff’s earlier claim.

“Good work, boy,” came Uncle Charlie’s undertoned approval. “Trust you to spot a switch like that. Instead of putting on a black beard and a fancy jacket to disguise himself, he’s taken them off. But you saw right through it!”

That commendation restored Biff's confidence in his own smartness, but only briefly. A moment later, he recalled that Uncle Charlie hadn't seen the bearish man in Berne, either by the Clock Tower or in the market place. Each time, the fellow had slipped away too soon. So Uncle Charlie wasn't confirming Biff's identification of the man; he was simply going on Biff's say-so.

"I guess we can forget it, Uncle Charlie," began Biff. "I guess there's no use following a false trail—"

He was going to add that he was now sure this was the wrong man, but his words were drowned by a tumult of shouts that filled the packed car. They had reached the halfway mark and were passing the other car, which was bringing about a dozen of the hotel workers down to Hautburg. By the time the exchange of greetings and banter was over, Charles Keene was expressing a few quickly formed ideas of his own.

"When we get to the terminus by the hotel," Uncle Charlie told Biff, "scoot out quickly and get ahead of everybody through the gate to the telecabin line. You know, the one with all the little gondolas that goes up to Altamont. That means that you will be the first of all these passengers to get there. Understand?"

"I understand," nodded Biff, "but it's no use—"

"What do you mean, no use?" interposed Uncle Charlie. "It will work out perfectly. It's getting dark enough so you can find some place where you can watch and trail this chap wherever he goes. I'll come

along later and wait for you at the station in Altamont. You come back there and tell me where he went. We'll pick it up from there."

"But look, Uncle Charlie, suppose he doesn't—"

Biff was going to say "Suppose he doesn't turn out to be the man we want," but his uncle didn't give him time for that. Instead, Charles Keene interrupted:

"Suppose he doesn't go on up to Altamont, but stops off at the Hotel Mondeau instead? In that case, my boy, I'll do the trailing and you can come back down and join me at the suite later. Now, let's see—there are about thirty people riding in this packet—so you can keep count of those who come up in the little cabins"—he paused, then nodded knowingly—"yes, just an approximate count will do. If you don't see me by that time, you will know that the trail is mine."

There was no good in arguing over such a well-laid plan. Biff decided to go through with it, on the chance of a thousand to one that this really was the burly, bearish stranger from Berne. The teleferic car reached the terminus near the hotel and Biff really had to squirm out rapidly to be among the first to the other gate, for all the workers were anxious to get home to Altamont.

At that, a few men shoved ahead, but the one Biff wanted wasn't with them. Biff noted that with a quick glance over his shoulder, just as the fellow was stepping from the big car that had brought them up from Hautburg. The man's clean-shaven face and drab

gray coat were a far cry from the black beard and the red jacket. Biff was wondering how he could have made so ridiculous a mistake until he noticed that the man was fully a head taller than two others with him.

Moreover, they were joking about something and in that brief glance, Biff saw the big man slap a heavy, forceful hand upon the shoulder of one companion. It reminded Biff of a clumsy bear's paw, as it had that day in Berne. This could be the same man after all!

Eagerly, Biff hustled through to the platform where people were boarding the little cabin cars as they came along. Each gondola took four persons and they were so controlled that they could be boarded without stopping, provided passengers were alert and entered in proper turn without causing any mix-up. Biff was just quick enough to avoid that as he darted into the first car and gained the last vacant seat.

The door closed and the little cabin was skimming upward, swaying on the cable, while the three men smiled at Biff and gave him friendly nods. Evidently they were pleased to see a youthful tourist, evidently an American, who was so clever at catching on to local ways. One, knew some English, who said:

"You do good. Very good. We keep on—no stop."

"That's what I thought would happen," rejoined Biff, "when I saw how each of you stepped into the car, all in regular order. So I did the same. But doesn't everybody do it that way?"

The worker translated Biff's statement to the others

and they listened solemnly until he came to the final question. Then they broke into uproarious laughter that really rocked the little cabin, thanks to the shoulder claps that they supplied with it. From the guffawed comments they exchanged, Biff decided that he must have said something funny. Then:

“They laugh because of your question,” the translator told Biff. “They say you should wait and see. Back there on the platform, if two people push each other, it makes a cabin stop. When one stops, they all stop. Then, maybe while two men fight, another gets into the cabin instead. Then—whoooo!”—he spread his arms in an expressive gesture—“away go all the cabins again!”

The other two men nodded their agreement, for they knew what their friend was telling Biff. Then, as if somebody had timed it, the cabin came to a sudden stop, swaying crazily upon its cable and the laughter broke out anew, while the translator added:

“They say everything is happening like they tell you. Two people argue—everything stops—somebody gets in—”

Before he could add “Whooooo!” the cabin was in motion again, and the men were laughing more than ever. From the way the little car rocked, Biff began to think that he really was Tim Larkin, with “Tim” standing for Timidity. It was still light enough to see the snow-covered ground below, and right now the gondola was rocking its way over a gulch that was

hundreds of feet in depth.

Then, to Biff's relief, the ground itself seemed to come up and meet the swaying car. They were skimming along a rocky ledge that had a ruddy glow in the sunset. If the car had stopped right then, Biff would have been tempted to open the door and jump out, rather than continue the dizzy trip. But the cabin did not stop. Instead, it took another sudden climb.

Still looking down at the ruddy ground, Biff realized that they had passed the Red Ledge that could be seen from Mondeau. It jutted out from the mountainside, but it was piled deep with huge, loose stones. Apparently, the Red Ledge had been a catch-all for avalanches for many years, preventing them from pouring down upon the much greater shelf where the Hotel Mondeau was located.

Once more, the gondola stopped, dangling over vast emptiness, while the three men laughed over the fact that another argument was going on, down at the platform in Mondeau. By then, Biff was getting used to it, so he laughed, too. But he was glad when the swaying car rode over the final hump and slithered into the platform at Altamont.

There, the passengers stepped out one by one, letting the gondola keep moving on for its return trip down to Mondeau. As Biff waved good-bye to his fellow-passengers, the one who had served as translator told him:

“Never any trouble, when we get to the end of trip,

like this. People then are friends. Only at the start they fight.”

Biff found himself a secluded corner near the end of the platform and watched the other cabins arrive. Each time, he scanned the passengers closely, looking for the big, clean-shaven man with the gray coat, who still acted like a huge, clumsy bear. Twice, the cable stopped, indicating that there was some trouble on the platform down in Mondeau; but always it started a few minutes later. Yet it had seemed a lot longer when Biff had been in a gondola hanging over empty space!

Except for those pauses, the cabins glided in at regular intervals, discharging four passengers each—or sometimes only three, indicating that somebody had missed the gondola. All the while, Biff was watching for the big man with the bearish manner, but there was no sign of him, not even after Biff had counted almost thirty persons in all.

Then came a gondola with only two passengers; and the next contained only one. Biff strained forward to watch, sure that it would have to be the big man from Berne. Instead, to Biff’s amazement, the lone passenger who alighted on the platform was his Uncle Charlie. As Biff strode forward, his uncle saw him and demanded:

“Where is he? Why didn’t you follow him? I saw him get on board below—didn’t you see him get off here?”

To that, Biff could only shake his head in utter

bewilderment. Somewhere, somehow, the mystery man from Berne had vanished in mid-air from the swaying gondola of a cable railway!

CHAPTER XII

The Secret of the Ledge

HERE was a mystery indeed, one that grew on Biff Brewster and his uncle, the more that they considered it. As they compared notes, there on the now deserted platform, they found that they had both pegged the bearish man quite closely and that their descriptions tallied.

“He was tall,” recalled Biff, “and he was clumsy, although he was trying not to be. But he couldn’t have covered that, getting out of one of those cable cabins. I’d have spotted him sure.”

“I know,” nodded Uncle Charlie. “I saw the awkward way he shoved himself into one car down at the other station. Like a big, blundering bear. They had to stop the cable, he was so slow.”

“They stopped it twice,” stated Biff. “I should know, because each time, the cabin was hanging over nothing. The second time, I thought we were stuck for keeps.”

Charles Keene nodded his corroboration.

“The first time,” he said, “was when the bearish man got on, only a few cabins after the one you took, and the cable wasn’t stopped long. But the second time, there was a real hold-up. People got in and out of a cabin, a fight started between two who were already in. Then suddenly, all the argument ended. Off they went, on their merry way.”

“But that was after our man started up here—”

“Long after. Now, let’s get in one of these cabins ourselves and ride down to the hotel. On the way, we can discuss it further.”

On the way, they passed full telecabins bringing more workers up from Hautburg to Altamont. Again, the cable stopped twice, but only briefly, indicating that there had been some slight delay on the Mondeau platform. It was now too dark to notice anything, except the jutting whiteness of the snow-covered Red Ledge as the cabin slithered over its edge, almost scraping bottom.

So instead of discussing the scenery, which they couldn’t see, they talked about the mystery man whom they had seen and would like to see again.

“I had a quick look at his face,” declared Biff, “while he was joking with one of his friends. He had a wide grin and a blunt, heavy chin.”

“It was a mean grin,” specified Uncle Charlie. “I noticed that when he snarled at another passenger who was trying to get into the cabin. But you are right

about the blunt chin.”

“A mean grin and a blunt chin,” repeated Biff. “Both of those were hidden when he wore that beard in Berne.”

“Perhaps that’s why he was wearing the beard,” Uncle Charlie suggested. “But he can’t hide that clumsy way of his.”

“Nor his size. He was real big, but it was hard to notice, because he was bulky, too. Like Muscles.”

“Like Muscles.” Charles Keene gave a decisive nod. “I think I’ll bring Muscles on here, Biff. We may be hearing from that sallow, chunky man again, the one who sneaked into your room at the Grand Châlet. Now, with this big bear-man from Berne moving into the picture, beard or no beard, it may be time to start our counter-offensive.”

“But we’re still stuck with this crazy game we are playing,” Biff reminded him. “I’m Tim Larkin, you’re Bert Shelby—”

“Only at the Hotel Mondeau,” interposed Uncle Charlie with a smile. “Here we are at the platform now. So look wise, the way a real chess wizard should.”

At dinner in the lavish but almost empty dining room, Charles Keene spelled out a temporary plan.

“I’ll send for Muscles,” he declared, “and we can keep him on the outside looking in, until the real Tim and his manager show up. Then we can ditch these parts we are playing, by saying it was just a stunt that was planned to give Tim some free time of his own—

and perhaps get some publicity for the Chess Congress.”

“That sounds good,” agreed Biff.

“And here’s something better,” proposed Uncle Charlie. “While I make trips up to Mondeau Peak, you can spend some time with your new friend Junius Croz. Since his grandfather used to work in Hautburg, they may know a lot about what’s going on there.”

“Then I should tell Junius what we are doing here?”

“Why not? Tallard and Junius are sure to guess that I’m interested in aerial cableways or I wouldn’t be flying up to the Peak. You can say I’m checking on them for your dad, because he needs some form of transportation to open up remote mines in South America, which is absolutely true. Just don’t mention my own pet scheme for solving the commuter problem and opening real estate developments in the hill sections of the United States.”

“Then I’ll mention the big man who shaved his black beard and then disappeared—”

“Absolutely. He may be our most important lead right now. But just say he was watching us in Berne, and that we spotted him later here, but that somehow he gave us the slip. Play that part strong.”

“And what about Tim Larkin? Do I mention him to Junius?”

“Just say you have a friend who will be playing in the big tournament run by the Chess Congress. That’s why we came here instead of going all over

Switzerland. There are enough funiculars and teleferic lines around here to keep me interested while you are watching the chess matches.”

“And what else should I tell Junius?”

“Anything you want, my boy. I leave that to your judgment.”

Biff liked to hear Uncle Charlie talk that way. It not only put Biff “on his own,” it meant that Uncle Charlie would stand by him, no matter what Biff might decide. But Biff was somewhat puzzled over the best way to enlist Junius in the cause. The disappearance of the bearish man from Berne, the riddle of the gold coin and the sly, swarthy man who sought it, reminded Biff a great deal of a chess problem, the kind that never was solved.

It was snowing the next morning, so Biff went back to chess, except at meal times, or during strolls about the spacious hotel. Several times, he thought that eyes were watching him, and twice he swung around to see a man who had apparently turned a bit more rapidly and was moving off before Biff could glimpse his face. The man was stocky of build, but Biff was sure he couldn’t be the swarthy-faced prowler who had picked up the trail in Interlaken and had later entered Biff’s room at the Grand Châlet.

Agile though that man had been, he also had displayed a pronounced limp that he had been unable to disguise. This man, here at the Hotel Mondeau, had an easy, ambling gait, so swift that each time, he

turned a corner and was gone before Biff could decide what to do about it. However, that did not rule him out as a spy.

When Biff mentioned the man to Uncle Charlie, they both agreed that he might be someone working either with the big bearish man who had given Biff the coin in Berne, or the swarthy prowler who came so close to stealing it at the Grand Châlet. But Charles Keene was decisive on one point; namely, that two rival factions were involved.

"The snow is already letting up," he declared, "so tomorrow morning, we can outwit both sides by getting off to an early start before breakfast. Nobody else will be leaving the hotel that early, and if we're being trailed, we'll know it."

They were off, almost at dawn, on a day so clear that the snow-clad summits with their streaks of bare gray rock seemed like great monsters ready to pounce upon their prey. But Biff kept wrenching his gaze from that stupendous sight to make sure that no human menace was closer at hand, such as someone trailing them from the hotel. But Uncle Charlie was right; nobody was up this early, except the first workers coming down from Altamont.

There were less than a dozen of them in the thirty-passenger teleferic car going down to Hautburg, and the bearish man who had staged the disappearance was not among them. From Hautburg, Uncle Charlie and Biff drove out by a valley road and had breakfast

in a little inn perched above the highway, where they could spot any other motorists who came that way. Again, their trail looked clear, so they drove on to Dubonne, where they boarded Tallard's plane for another trip to Mondeau Peak.

This time, however, Tallard decided to take Biff directly down to Hautburg from the Peak, so that Biff could spend the day with Junius Croz. Not until they had left Uncle Charlie at the survey cabin and were zooming down past Altamont, did Biff realize what an opportunity this flight was giving him.

Here, in broad daylight, he was able to study every foot of the telecabin cable line between Altamont and Mondeau, the route the bearish man had been traveling when he vanished. Tallard veered briefly to show a large depression caused by landslides, which he termed the "Giant's Mixing Bowl," at one end of the ledge; then he skirted the edge of the Red Ledge itself. Red rock showed through the latest snow, but loose stones from landslides made the ledge impassable.

Then the plane was past and Biff was viewing the cables of the aerial way straight on. They came from a short supporting column above the ledge to a much taller one below the ledge. An empty telecabin was going up, and Biff saw it pass the edge, almost graze the ledge, and then lift upward; a moment later, a downcoming cabin skimmed along for forty feet or more, then swung outward like a ski jumper on a take-off.

Only from this vantage point could that be noticed; and Biff also realized that from along the line, either above the ledge or below, the cabins were completely out of sight when they took that dip just past the rim of the ledge. It was a blind spot, but almost impossible to notice. Only this chance flight in the Piper Cub had given Biff that clue!

Biff wished he could get word of it to Uncle Charlie, but he decided to keep it to himself at present. They landed in back of the Croz house, and soon Tallard was on his way again, leaving Biff with Junius, who was delighted indeed to see his new friend. Enthusiastically, Junius told Biff that the ski slope on the neighboring hillside was in fine shape and that he had a pair of skis ready for Biff to use.

Half an hour later, Biff was taking a thrilling sky ride in an open chair lift that Junius called a teleseat. Biff had been on many chair lifts, but in most cases, the ground had seemed quite close. This one went up at such a sharp angle that Biff felt that he was dangling over the whole town of Hautburg, which spread out in the foreground. Junius came up in the next seat, and soon they were skimming down the ski slope. At the bottom, when Junius suggested another trip, Biff looked up and gave a slight gulp.

"Everybody does that," Junius laughed. "They say the ride up in the lift is more exciting than the ski trip down the slope. It takes you a few times to get used to it."

After those few times, they were trudging back to the Croz house for lunch, when Junius asked:

"How do you feel now, Biff? Are you used to dangling over nothing?"

"Just about," returned Biff. Then, on a sudden impulse, he added, "I'm not sure, though, about taking a trip in a telecabin up to Altamont."

"Up to Altamont! Why, that's nothing compared to this!"

"You don't think so? Did they ever leave you hanging in one of those cabins so long that you thought it would never start?"

"Why, no. Why should they do that, Biff?"

"I'll tell you why, Junius."

Biff hesitated a moment; then, being that far into it, he followed the line that Charles Keene had recommended. He told Junius that his uncle was interested in aerial tramways as a means of hauling ore from remote mines. At that, Junius broke in:

"There used to be an iron mine on the Red Ledge. But it was abandoned and nobody goes there now."

"I know one man who does," returned Biff. "He was watching us in Berne, and here in Hautburg, Uncle Charlie and I saw him again, so we watched him. I went up to Altamont ahead of him, while Uncle Charlie stayed at Mondeau. But he vanished in between."

"You mean he dropped off when the cable line stopped? Somewhere like the Red Ledge?"

"That's right. I didn't realize it the other night, but today, when Mr. Tallard piloted his plane along the Red Ledge, I saw a blind spot, where the cabins swing close to the ground."

"But how could anyone be sure that a cabin would stop there, Biff? Or stop long enough for anyone to drop off?"

"Very simple," explained Biff. "My uncle saw some men start an argument on the Mondeau platform, about getting into the next cabin. That stopped the cable, and they continued the argument to hold it up. They must have been counting the cabins going by—"

"And they knew exactly when their friend's cabin had reached the Red Ledge!" interrupted Junius. "You've hit it, Biff!"

"I've only guessed at it," declared Biff. "Now, the problem is to prove it, and the only way to do that is to get up to the Red Ledge and watch what happens there."

"And that," exclaimed Junius, "will be very easy."

"Easy?" echoed Biff. "How can we drop off from a telecabin without giving ourselves away?"

"We'll go down from Altamont on skis," explained Junius, "by way of the Giant's Mixing Bowl. We'll follow the ledge from there."

"But somebody may spot us going up the telecabin line to Altamont—"

"No, they won't, Biff. We'll ask Mr. Tallard to take us up there in his plane."

“But it will be a long hard climb from the Red Ledge up to Altamont again—”

“We won’t bother with that either. We’ll ask Mr. Tallard to pick us up at the Giant’s Mixing Bowl later.”

Biff shook his head in admiration; then said:

“You think of everything, don’t you?” He paused, then added: “Except one thing, Junius. When are you going to arrange all this with Mr. Tallard?”

“Right now,” rejoined Junius. “Mr. Tallard said he’d be stopping back about this time”—still laughing, Junius pointed to a tiny speck approaching in the distant sky—“and there he is!”

CHAPTER XIII

The Clue of the Coin

ROY TALLARD willingly lifted the boys to Altamont, a job that was a matter of a few minutes with the fast-climbing Piper Cub. He also agreed to pick them up at the Giant's Mixing Bowl a few hours later. For anyone who knew the terrain well—as Junius did—the ski trip offered very little hazard. But if Tallard had known the dual nature of their mission, with the spying angle involved, he might have advised against it.

They started from the edge of Altamont and took a roundabout course to avoid notice in the little town itself. For Biff, the trip was a real thriller from the start, though Junius took it as a matter of course. They would ski down a slope that looked as though it would carry them off into a space a mile deep; then Junius would change course ever so slightly and they would be gliding down a veritable runway between two mountain folds. Again, what seemed to be a precipice ahead, would turn out to be an easy slope when they

neared the edge.

At times, they would reach dead ends, but always a short climb over a hump would take them to a new starting point. Junius explained that a full-fledged ski slope was planned for this sector as part of the development of the Mondeau region. During one of their rest pauses, Junius explained that he had gone along with several parties that had studied the route. That was why he knew it so well.

The closest thing to a real brush with danger came at the end of the trip. By then, Junius knew that Biff could ski well enough to follow any lead. So he waved him along a snowy slope that really rimmed a yawning chasm. But Biff fixed his mind completely on the course ahead, and soon it leveled off, bringing them back into a mountain fold where they stopped on an upward slope. A short climb up that and they were looking down into the Giant's Mixing Bowl.

There, they left their skis and followed the inner rim, which wasn't quite as safe as it had appeared from Tallard's plane. The rocks were jagged, with deep cracks and fissures, but Junius found ways around or over them. They reached the great loose stone pile that made the ledge impassable, except by climbing over the stones themselves. There, Junius warned against dislodging any of the stones, as it might start a slide that would carry them clear across the ledge and off it, though the chance was very slight.

Finally, they came to a lookout spot, where an

opening between two crazily toppled stones gave them a slanted view along the clear portion of the Red Ledge. There they saw the cable lines and as they watched, a gaudy red telecabin came bobbing up over the brink, skimmed across the ledge and rose on a steeper angle. Soon afterward, another telecabin did the same thing in reverse, coming down the other cable. Junius gave an admiring chuckle.

"You spotted it right, Biff," he declared. "They almost do scrape bottom, when you see them from over here. Let's keep watching them awhile."

Watch they did, crouching a little lower each time a cabin stopped briefly above the ledge, swaying on the cable, for it was still broad daylight here on the high ledge, though there was deep dusk in the valleys and some lights were already twinkling down there. But there was nothing amiss in the stopping of the telecabins, and both Biff and Junius noted and commented on the fact that there was close to a ten-foot space between the cabin and the rocky soil below.

"A man could make that drop easy enough," Biff was saying, "but getting up into one of those cabins would be a job—"

"Watch this!" came a sharp interruption from Junius. "But keep low while you do!"

Ever quick of eye, Junius had spotted motion from the door of another cabin that was just then bobbing over the rim of the ledge. The door was flung wide as the cabin made a swinging halt, and a man slid from

it, catching the floor of the cabin with his hands, hanging on just long enough to turn his action into an easy drop. By then, a second man was beginning the same maneuver and he was followed by a third, each taking only a few seconds for the process.

“The one in the middle!” Biff whispered, gripping Junius by the arm. “He’s taller than the others—see? He’s the man I saw in Berne. He’s dropping off the way he did the other night.”

“But what about the others?” queried Junius. “You said the cars were coming up full. How could that be?”

Before Biff could even guess, they saw how.

Three other men were dashing forward from the lower extension of the mammoth stone pile on which Biff and Junius had established their temporary lookout. They, too, were dressed in work clothes. When the trio reached the big man, he and his two companions hoisted the newcomers right up to the telecabin, in the style of acrobats forming a human pyramid.

There was a fourth man still in the cabin; he helped haul in the first member of the new group; together, they pulled up the other two. The man from Berne and his two pals darted to the stone pile; the door slammed shut and the closed telecabin was in motion, for the cable was again on its way.

“What a job!” gasped Biff in amazement. “Why, if they did that with three or four cabins, they could change a whole work crew—three men at a clip. But

where did they go?”

Junius, instead of replying, was worming forward between the lookout stones, gesturing for Biff to follow, which he did. Again, Junius hissed, “Don’t loosen any stones!” and Biff became doubly cautious. Now it wasn’t just a question of dislodging a stone large enough to start a landslide; even a tiny one would warn the three men below that somebody was spying on them from above.

So the boys were forced to ease forward cautiously and thereby missed their opportunity. By the time they poked their heads above some jutting stones and gained a good look, there was no sign of anyone below. They saw nothing other than some larger stones that formed a solid foundation of the pile.

“They must have an opening there,” said Biff. “Where would it lead? Into the old abandoned mine?”

“Very probably,” returned Junius. “They could drop supplies from the cable line and take them in the same way, too. We’d better start moving back now.”

Biff agreed, for in their present position there was a chance of being spotted by a passing telecabin. They worked back cautiously, lying low each time a cabin went past. They were back behind their lookout when they heard the drone of a distant motor, which meant that they had a rendezvous still farther back, namely near the Giant’s Mixing Bowl where Tallard soon would be landing.

They had crossed the last stretch of loose stones,

still with the same caution, when the Piper Cub dipped into sight and teetered to one of its neat landings on the very edge of the bowl. Biff and Junius gathered up their skis and joined Tallard in the plane, which took off from its perch as neatly as it had landed. As they zoomed down to Hautburg, Junius suggested:

“Why don’t you stay at my house overnight, Biff? I’d like you to tell my grandfather all that’s happened.”

“A good idea,” agreed Biff. “I’ll ask Mr. Tallard to tell Uncle Charlie that I’m staying here.”

From that message, Charles Keene would know that his nephew was getting some results along suggested lines.

Biff had an early dinner with the Croz family, but no mention was made of the all-important subject until Grandfather Croz returned to his workshop, as he always did for a few hours in the evening. Junius ushered Biff in, and soon Biff was telling the facts that Junius already knew, with Junius translating as usual. Old Mr. Croz was intently interested and wanted more details, so Biff gave them, describing how the big man in Berne had first been wearing a black beard and the red jacket of a band uniform. The old watchmaker thought that over; then shook his head. He spoke in Romansch, which Junius translated:

“My grandfather says there are many big men, both with beards and without them. There are many bands whose members wear red uniforms, and perhaps this

man just pretended he was one of them. If he really belongs here in Hautburg, my grandfather might place him, if only he knew a little more about him.”

While Junius spoke, his grandfather beamed a continual smile at Biff and kept watching him with a hopeful eye. Until that moment, Biff hadn’t thought of mentioning the rare gold coin that he still carried with him, but now he felt that it might be a help. He brought the coin from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Croz.

“The bearded man gave me this,” said Biff. “It’s valuable, but I don’t see how it can tell us much about him.”

Old Mr. Croz didn’t agree. Spryly, he took the coin to his workbench and studied it carefully under the magnifying lens. Junius was puzzled, for Biff had not mentioned the coin to him; and now, when Mr. Croz began talking again, Junius translated in a still more puzzled manner:

“My grandfather says the man must have worked in the Apex Watch Factory, here in Hautburg. How he knows that, from a coin, he does not say. Wait, though”—Junius paused to hear more—“he is saying that he will tell you himself!

Old Mr. Croz laid aside his magnifying lens, thrust the coin under Biff’s eyes, and said in English:

“Watch!”

Biff watched, while the old man pressed opposite corners of the octagonal coin. The circular rim sprang

open. The pressure had released it. Again, Mr. Croz said, "Watch!"

Once more he was right. The interior of the coin was hollow and it contained a thin, delicate watch, which swung upward as the old man tipped the coin forward. The rare gold coin was actually a watch case in disguise.

The watch inside was one of the finest Biff Brewster had ever seen, and he was amazed to learn that unknowingly he had been carrying it all these days!

CHAPTER XIV

Tables Turn Twice

WHAT to do next was a real problem for Biff Brewster, but old Mr. Croz promptly solved it. He returned the coin to Biff and then told Junius exactly what they both were to do. So the boys went into Hautburg and twenty minutes later, they were talking with Giles Marcou, the manager of the Apex Watch Factory, in the parlor of his home.

First, Junius introduced Biff and had him show the coin watch to Mr. Marcou, who promptly recognized it as a product of his own factory.

“My grandfather is very anxious to find the man who made that watch,” said Junius. “He thought perhaps you could help him.”

Junius did not say why his grandfather wanted to find the man, nor did Mr. Marcou ask about that. Apparently, old Mr. Croz was held in such high esteem in Hautburg that any information he wanted would be supplied without question. But Giles Marcou was

unable to give a positive answer.

"It is an assembled job," he stated. "One person supplies the coin, another some of the parts, and we may even send those out to some special worker like your grandfather. If you could tell me something more about the man your grandfather wants to find, it would help."

Junius turned to Biff, who promptly supplied a description of the bearish man from Berne, both with and without his black beard. Marcou smiled as he listened with half-closed eyes.

"We have had many workers with beards," he said, with a smile, "and many without. Big men who have played in bands, some so powerful that they can blow a fifteen-foot alpenhorn that can be heard five miles away. So I cannot tell which man this is."

"But my grandfather said you would have lists of workers," persisted Junius, "with pictures and descriptions of them."

"That is right," Marcou nodded, "and you are quite welcome to look them over. I shall give you a note to the watchman at the factory. He will show you to the office where we keep those records. Here is a key to the file cabinet, but be sure that you put all the cards back in their proper order."

The boys went to the Apex Factory, where an obliging watchman showed them to a corner room on the second floor of the old original building, which was built in imitation of an ancient Swiss castle. Biff

and Junius agreed that the file room was a weird place, with its high ceiling, tall windows and gloomy corners with huge, dark, oaken doors. The file cabinets, however, were strictly modern, and the one that Biff and Junius consulted contained hundreds of cards, with data on everybody who had furnished any special work or services for the Apex Company.

“Going through these will take us all night,” groaned Junius, “or maybe all week!”

“Not if we do it systematically,” returned Biff. “Go after those with photos first. Beards or no beards, check them out for age, height, weight, whatever else may help.”

Most of the cards contained such data and after another hour, Biff and Junius had winnowed down the cards to perhaps fifty. They had been working under a strong light, so they decided to rest a few minutes. Due to the glare close by, the rest of the room seemed gloomier than ever, and as Biff looked around, he commented:

“A creepy old room, isn’t it?”

“Did you say creepy?” parried Junius. “You should have said creaky. Listen to that sound in the corner. That door must have swung loose, unless maybe it’s a ghost walking—”

It wasn’t a ghost and it wasn’t walking. It was a man and he was springing forward into the light, bashing the door wide open, now that he realized his stealthy approach was discovered. From his pocket, he



From his pocket he whipped a gleaming revolver.

whipped a gleaming revolver, which he pointed in the direction of the astonished boys. But of the two, Biff was more frozen than Junius and for a good reason.

Biff recognized the face behind the glittering gun. He was the stocky, swarthy man, with the sharp eyes that were narrowed into a perpetual scowl. Biff knew that face from Interlaken and again from the Grand Châlet, and each time he had seen it, his dislike for the man had increased.

Seeing that the boys were completely helpless with no one there to back them, the man let his scowl spread to what Biff took for a triumphant leer. He thrust his gun away, but kept his hand with one thumb in his coat pocket, as a reminder that he could bring the weapon into quick play, if needed. He turned long enough to wave for a companion to join him, and another man of stocky build stepped in from the doorway.

This man was youthful, with a pudgy, light-complexioned face that wore a completely innocent expression, even to his blue eyes, which had a friendly, inquiring look.

“Kurt Ensel!” The exclamation came from Junius. He turned to Biff and added, “He’s a watchmaker—or says he is—why, he even came out to see my grandfather, hoping to get a job. My grandfather almost took him on!”

The swarthy man scowled happily at his pudgy-faced companion and asked:

“Is that right, Kurt?”

“Absolutely right.” Kurt’s blue eyes had taken on a glitter as hard as steel as he stared straight at Junius. “This boy is Junius Croz. His grandfather, Lycurgus Croz, is the best watchmaker in Hautburg.”

The swarthy man concentrated on the boys, and announced in a raspy tone:

“Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Pierre Renault. Did you ever hear of me?” Then, as Junius shook his head, Renault added, “That’s good. In fact, it’s for the best.” He narrowed his dark eyes on Biff. “But I’ve heard of you,” Renault continued. “You’re Timothy Larkin, the best chess player in the world.” With that, Renault swung to Junius, whose mouth had opened in astonishment. In the same raspy tone, the swarthy man demanded: “Did he tell you that?”

“Why, no,” began Junius. “He said his name was—”

Junius caught himself too late and Biff gave an inward groan. This swarthy man who answered to the name of Pierre Renault was indeed an expert, as Tim Larkin had claimed. Already, he was playing Biff and Junius, one against the other, and his scowl became a look of triumph, though he didn’t follow it up by asking Junius what other name his new friend had used.

Instead, Renault concentrated on Biff and demanded:

“Let’s see that coin of yours. The fifty-dollar piece.”

Biff hesitated and Renault dipped his hand into his

gun pocket. There was nothing for Biff to do but dig in his own pocket and bring out the coin, which he did. Renault took it, studied it closely, and nodded.

"The same," he said, "and a phony. Look it over."

Renault handed the coin to Ensel, whose own face showed a satisfied leer.

"A phony," he agreed, "but a good one. Like we figured, it was specially made for this!"

With the final words, Ensel found the hidden catch, exactly as Mr. Croz had. Ensel pressed two corners of the octagon and the coin sprang open, revealing the watch inside. Eagerly Renault took it from Ensel, to inspect it more closely. Then:

"Lay that down and put your hands up," came a firm, brisk voice from behind the gloating pair. "Keep faced away from me, just as you are, and start moving apart—well apart."

Both Renault and Ensel could tell that the speaker meant business, so they did as ordered. Biff noted that Renault had no limp at all, and he realized now how clever the man had been, faking one in Interlaken and at the Grand Châlet. While stalking Biff up at the Hotel Mondeau, Renault hadn't limped at all; hence Biff had failed to recognize him.

Yes, Renault was an expert, and so was Ensel. But right then, neither was as expert as the man who came into sight as soon as they had spread apart. He was standing there, ready with a gun of his own, Charles Keene in person, as cool and calm as Biff had ever seen

him. Almost beside him, but a few steps in back, was Roy Tallard, also with a drawn revolver.

Biff realized that Tallard must have told Uncle Charlie about the trip the boys had taken up to Altamont and down to the Red Ledge. So Tallard had flown Uncle Charlie into Hautburg and they had learned enough from Junius's grandfather to follow up with some investigative work of their own. It was timely indeed, the way Charles Keene had turned the tables on Pierre Renault and Kurt Ensel, those partners in some scheme of their own.

Renault, however, did not think so. Biff saw the man's scowl turn darker than ever, as Renault spoke harshly:

"I recognize your voice, Shelby. Or maybe you're using some other name besides Bert Shelby, just as this boy wonder of yours has switched from Tim Larkin."

"We can discuss that later," declared Charles Keene, coolly, as he moved up behind Renault. "For the present I'll take your gun." He reached into Renault's coat pocket and found it. Then, turning to Tallard, Charles Keene added, "You do the same with the other chap, Roy."

While Tallard was taking a gun from Ensel's pocket, Renault spoke again, in a tone that suited his sarcastic leer.

"In my other pocket," said Renault, "you will find my credentials. You had better look them over. My

partner is carrying his, too, and you may do the same with them.”

Uncle Charlie found Renault’s credentials, and Tallard soon had Ensel’s. They stepped back to compare them and Charles Keene exclaimed:

“Why, this man Renault has a badge of the United States Secret Service and an Interpol card as well.”

“Here’s an Interpol card with Ensel’s name,” added Tallard, “and another that identifies him as a special agent of the Swiss Federal Government.”

Their complete surprise had thrown Charles Keene and Roy Tallard momentarily off guard. That, Biff and Junius could plainly see. Neither Renault nor Ensel could see it, for their backs were toward the other men, but they guessed it. They turned their heads toward each other and darted those sharp, ugly glances that Biff had seen them exchange before. In a flash, Biff realized their purpose and shouted a warning, but too late.

Actually diving as they wheeled about, Renault and Ensel bowled over Charles Keene and Roy Tallard, snatched their guns from them and bounded up like rubber balls. Turning, Renault and Ensel covered the two men whom they had overwhelmed and they had the boys at gunpoint as well, for Biff and Junius were again too startled to begin a move.

“And now,” announced Pierre Renault in a sharp tone of final triumph, “we’ll get to the bottom of this business!”

CHAPTER XV

The Game Within the Game

BIFF BREWSTER had never eyed a man whom he mistrusted more than Pierre Renault, with one possible exception. That exception was Renault's partner, Kurt Ensel. Biff was sure that the pair were working on false credentials, though he couldn't guess what their game was. If the choice had been up to Biff, he wouldn't have answered any questions, not as long as he could help it.

However, Charles Keene took the opposite tack. After he had come to his feet and shown due chagrin over his discomfiture, Uncle Charlie became his usual smiling self and told Renault and Ensel:

"You two are in control, so ask whatever you want. We'll give you straight answers. My name, by the way, is Charles Keene, and this boy is my nephew, Biff Brewster. So we can pick it up from there."

Suddenly, Biff saw Uncle Charlie's reason. He wanted to square everything with Junius Croz and Roy

Tallard. They knew now that Biff and Uncle Charlie were the persons that they claimed to be. So whatever might happen, they would still be on the same side. That, Biff decided, was an excellent start.

By then, Pierre Renault was putting the sharp query:

“All right, Keene, then tell us why your nephew Biff started posing as Tim Larkin, the chess wizard, and you as his manager, Bert Shelby.”

“That wasn’t our idea,” rejoined Charles Keene, with a bland smile. “Somebody saw us playing chess in a Berne hotel and took a picture of us. Then more people took camera shots. We were in Interlaken when we saw Biff’s picture in the Berne newspaper, and we really were surprised—”

“Wait a moment,” interrupted Kurt Ensel abruptly. “If you were so surprised, why did you go on acting the part?”

The question was directed at Biff, who caught a slight nod from Uncle Charlie.

“Because by then,” Biff answered, “we had met up with the real Tim Larkin and he was traveling with us. He was unhappy, the way everybody was hounding him, so we agreed to take them off his trail. That’s all.”

“A likely story, that is!” Ensel sneered.

“It’s a good story, Kurt.” The surprise statement came from Renault. “I happen to know, because there was another boy in Interlaken, though I wasn’t quite sure that he was with them. Put away your gun. These

people are all right and I'm sure they will prove a big help to us."

Renault was putting away his gun, and Ensel was about to do the same, when he remembered the coin watch, which Renault had laid on the table at Charles Keene's order. Still dubious, Ensel gestured to the hollow fifty-dollar gold piece and asked:

"But how did the boy happen to get that?"

"Let them explain it later," rejoined Renault. "As things now stand, they have a right to hear our story first. Agreed?"

Ensel nodded that he agreed and the glower faded from Renault's face. He seemed a totally different person as he gestured for everyone to take chairs and hold a calm discussion. Charles Keene gave a reassuring nod to Biff and the rest, for he was confident by now that Renault and Ensel were exactly what they claimed to be, two bona fide investigators—one American, the other Swiss—working on a case for Interpol, the International Police Commission.

Renault then became the spokesman:

"There has been an influx of gold to the United States," he declared, "all in the form of rare coins, which are regarded as collectors' items and can therefore be imported. This had been going on for quite some time when it was discovered that the coins were counterfeits that were being melted down for their gold."

Noting puzzled looks on the faces of his listeners,

Renault explained his use of the term “counterfeit.”

“The coins were made of real gold,” he continued, “but they were stamped from imitation dies. They were good enough to pass close inspection, particularly because their weight was right, except for a few lots that actually contained *too much* gold per coin. But even those got by, and once they were melted down, there was no way of tracing them at all.”

While Renault spoke, Biff noted the amazing change that had come over him, now that he no longer had a part to play. He seemed like a professor in his manner and style of speech.

“Some of the counterfeits were so good,” declared Renault, “that the smugglers decided to sell them as rare coins instead of melting them down. Why not?” He gave an expressive shrug. “Suppose they brought in a thousand coins, with thirty-five dollars’ worth of gold in each. Melted down, they would be worth thirty-five thousand dollars. But if fifty of those coins could be sold as collectors’ items at five hundred to a thousand dollars each, they alone could bring thirty-five thousand dollars. So they were sold that way.”

Charles Keene could guess what was coming next. Casually, he asked:

“And was that how the United States Secret Service came into the picture?”

“It was,” Renault acknowledged. “Some of the collectors who bought such coins discovered that they were false and made a complaint. Rounding up

counterfeiters is the business of the Secret Service, so we went after them. By then, the smuggling ring had become wary and was no longer bringing in rare coins. So our only course was to trace the coins clear back to their source.”

“By working in connection with Interpol?”

“Exactly, Mr. Keene. But we found that the Interpol investigators were having their troubles, too. They were dealing with a gigantic counterfeiting ring of worldwide scope. All kinds of gold coins—modern as well as antique—were being counterfeited and unloaded in countries wherever they could bring a premium, either as coins or gold. Every shipment was perfectly covered, so there was no way of locating the source of operation where the counterfeits were actually being made.”

Warming to his theme, Renault paused for effect and Charles Keene, becoming more and more cordial toward the Secret Service operative, chimed in with the question:

“But you finally suspected that the counterfeiters were operating here in Switzerland. How did you learn that?”

“Through items like these.” With a broad smile, Renault reached over and picked up the Panama-Pacific fifty-dollar gold piece that contained the thin Swiss watch. Holding Biff’s lucky token between his fingertips, Renault added, “For many years, skilled craftsmen have been hollowing out gold coins to make

novelty cases for watches, a perfectly legal procedure, you understand.

“But during a routine checkup, we came across some coin watches in a New York jewelry store and found that they were identical with some of the counterfeit coins. The jeweler had bought them in Switzerland, so we assumed that the coins themselves were being counterfeited here and that workers in the counterfeiting plants were using rejected coins or stamping out hollow shells for coin watches, as a sideline of their own. This coin is a good example, a type that the counterfeiters were afraid to use any longer.”

Renault was toying with the imitation fifty-dollar gold piece. Now, he laid it aside and added:

“I was assigned to the case, so I came to Switzerland. Using my own name, Pierre Renault, I posed as a wholesale jeweler interested in coin watches. Some were being manufactured here in Hautburg, so Kurt Ensel was sent to cover this sector. That is the way things stand at present.”

“Except,” put in Charles Keene smoothly, “that you also happen to be here. Just how did that come about?”

“I expected you to ask that,” Renault declared, smiling. “We were watching for other indications. We knew that the big men behind the international counterfeiting racket would all want to have a hand in it. So when we heard that a great Chess Congress had

been scheduled at the Hotel Mondeau before the building was anywhere near finished, we became quite suspicious. We decided that the chess tournament might be a cover-up for a meeting of the counterfeiting cartel.

“We learned that a young American chess wizard, Timothy Larkin, was coming to play at Mondeau. But he had sprung into fame so suddenly that no one knew anything about him. I found out that he had gone to Berne, but no photographs of him were available. Ensel and other agents needed them to watch for young Larkin in case he happened to be connected with the counterfeiter, either personally or through his manager, Bert Shelby.

“So I phoned an Interpol man in Berne and told him to go out as a photographer and get pictures of Tim Larkin for the newspapers. He did a fine job”—Renault’s tone took on its old sarcasm—“a fine job, indeed! He fooled himself by taking pictures of you”—Renault was speaking directly to Biff now—“and he fooled everyone else including me. Word came to me and I trailed you by mistake.”

Now that the tension was relieved, Biff suddenly began to laugh at the oddity of the whole situation. He tried to stop himself, rather than appear foolish, but by then everyone else was laughing, too, Renault most of all. But as the merriment died, Renault became very serious, as he spoke sharply to Biff:

“Now, you must tell me something. Where and how

did you come to acquire this special counterfeit coin?"

"After your cameraman took his third shot," replied Biff, "a big man with a black beard clapped my shoulder. I ducked him then, but later he caught up with me and gave me the coin, saying to keep it for luck. He was wearing a red jacket and a hat with a red ribbon, and before I could follow him, he was in with a big band of musicians all dressed the same as he was. I know you won't believe me, Mr. Renault, but—"

"But I do believe you!" broke in Renault sharply. He swung to Ensel. "You see, Kurt? I was right. They've been watching you, here in Hautburg. They listened in on our phone calls and learned that I was having our man in Berne take pictures of young Larkin. So they sent their own man down there."

"And when he saw the photographer taking shots of Biff," supplied Charles Keene, "he too thought that Biff was Tim. Would that be why he gave Biff the coin?"

"Exactly," assured Renault, "to make it look as though Tim was linked with the counterfeiters. We know now that Tim isn't. They were hoping to use him to make us show our hand."

"Then I made a mistake," said Uncle Charlie, "when I let that souvenir dealer see that coin in Interlaken."

"That's why I followed you to the Grand Châlet," declared Renault, "to get a good look at the coin and see if it was counterfeit. I was about to test it as a coin watch, but I let that wait." He turned to Biff and added earnestly, "I'm sorry that I almost had you leaping that

rail after me. It wasn't until I had swung to the balcony below that I realized how close you came to vaulting into the ravine. It's too bad"—Renault smiled whimsically—"that you didn't stay that close to the bearded man in Berne. I'd like to find him now!"

It was Biff's turn to smile.

"If you give me a little leeway, Mr. Renault," he said, "so I can get back to the job I was doing when you came in, you may get what you want. We've narrowed down the files to these"—Biff picked up the batch of fifty cards—"and somewhere among them you will find your man!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Grand Alliance

WITHIN five minutes, Biff Brewster found the card he wanted and displayed it triumphantly as he exclaimed, "There!"

There was a small picture of a face with a black beard, a squarish face, its wide forehead and eyes giving a key to the dimensions of the blunt chin and wide mouth, which were partly hidden by the beard.

This, however, was not the heavy, almost bushy beard that the man had worn in Berne. He must have grown it, perhaps with a definite purpose toward disguise, and then shaved it afterward hoping to avoid recognition entirely. So this picture, probably taken a few years ago, was doubly damaging to the man's cause.

From it, Biff could visualize the face either way, bearded or not. On the latter count, Charles Keene was able to confirm his nephew's finding. Emphatically, Uncle Charlie declared:

“That is the man I saw getting into the telecabin on the Mondeau platform.”

The man’s name, according to the file card, was Hugo Kroft, and there was data on his height, weight, and age that tallied with the general impressions gained by Biff and Uncle Charlie. Kroft’s employment at the Apex Factory had been brief and intermittent, according to his card. He had never been a watchmaker, but had been first employed in the tool-making department. Later, he had been assigned to construction work about the plant. In and out, on the job and off, Kroft was just the sort of man to be working secretly for some outside interest. Pierre Renault broached that point as he studied the card:

“This fellow probably had the run of the plant,” declared Renault pointedly, “without anybody realizing it. He’s just the sort who would know everybody, yet nobody would notice him particularly. A big, blundering chap, too clumsy to excite suspicion.”

“I don’t remember him at all,” stated Ensel, studying the card. “He must have stayed out of my way deliberately.”

“Which shows they had you spotted, Kurt,” decided Renault. “Evidently, they’ve given him some sort of roving commission.” Renault turned to Biff, “What else do you know about him?”

“Only that he is in charge of some sort of crew operating in the abandoned iron mine on the Red

Ledge,” declared Biff. He turned to Charles Keene and added, “That’s where he dropped off when he disappeared the other night, Uncle Charlie. So did the others who were in the telecabin with him—”

“And the men from another shift took their place,” put in Junius eagerly. “We know, because we saw it happen.”

As the boys detailed the whole procedure, Charles Keene was utterly amazed. He supposed that the boys had gone to the Red Ledge to check on some slight clue, but he hadn’t the least idea that they had struck such a find. Tallard, too, was quite impressed. But as for Renault and Ensel, this fitted perfectly into the picture that they had already formed. Until now, they hadn’t known just where to look for the missing piece of the jigsaw.

“So that’s where the counterfeiting plant is,” decided Renault. “In the old iron mine!”

“With workers coming up from Hautburg, stopping off and going on to Altamont later,” added Ensel. “Just as if they were going to and from Hautburg on regular jobs. No wonder I couldn’t find any trace of a counterfeiting plant in Hautburg or anywhere else in the countryside.”

“But everybody remembered you, Kurt.”

Renault smiled as he said that, and Junius Croz came up with a question:

“Was that why Mr. Ensel came to my grandfather’s house looking for a job?”

"That's why I did," acknowledged Ensel. "I didn't trust anybody, even the oldest and most reliable watchmaker in these parts. Anybody's house might have been a blind, or cover for a counterfeiting plant, because the plant itself might be anywhere. I even checked through every watch factory—that's why I am so familiar with this one—on the chance that one might have a hidden plant. I tabbed all the workers coming into Hautburg, but I never thought of following those who went home to Altamont."

"We'll do that now," decided Renault, "and we'll use Hugo Kroft as the kingpin. Only I'll put new operatives on that task, Kurt, because by now you're really marked. I'll keep you with me as chief adviser."

"So I muff the job," observed Ensel, shaking his head, "and get myself kicked upstairs." His lips spread in a genuine smile as he realized how lucky he had been. In a tone of real appreciation, he nodded to Biff and Junius. "Thanks, boys."

Biff and Junius smiled back. They were warming more and more to Renault and Ensel, now that they were all on the same side. There was no question on that score, for Renault, at this moment, was beginning to map a campaign in which everyone present was involved.

"Now that we have the lead we need," he declared, "Ensel and I will soon know all we need to raid the counterfeiting plant when the time comes. As for you, Mr. Keene, now that you've told us who you really are,

I presume you have some interest in aerial tramways, because of those plane trips you have taken to Mondeau Peak. Am I right?"

"You are." Charles Keene nodded. "I think they have commercial possibilities, particularly in mining operations, a field in which Biff's father is quite interested. It is partly on his account that I have been studying aerial cableways."

That was all quite true, as Biff knew, and Renault was satisfied to let it go at that, without further questions. Obviously, Renault could check on it through Interpol, if he wanted. But he had something more in mind.

"We can use you, Mr. Keene," said Renault. "When you get back to the Hotel Mondeau, tell them who you really are. Talk about cableways and mining operations. It's sure to get back to the counterfeiting ring and it will help cover what Interpol is doing. Nobody will be surprised if you happen to fly over Red Ledge to look at the old abandoned mine. But don't do it until we tell you to."

As Charles Keene nodded, Pierre Renault swung to Roy Tallard and added:

"We're counting you in on the investigation as Mr. Keene's pilot. Go right along with him, as you're doing now."

Next, it was Biff's turn.

"We're counting heavily on you, young fellow," Renault assured him. "You can act as our contact with

Tim Larkin. From what you have told us, he seems to be all right, otherwise they wouldn't have tried to frame him by giving him that coin. So they will be watching him to see if he's working for Interpol, which he will be, but with you as the go-between. Tell him that anything he hears during those chess matches, he is to pass along to us—through you."

Biff nodded.

"That isn't all," Renault went on. "You won't be watching many of those chess matches yourself. Between times, keep up your friendship with Junius here. We'll use him as a further link in the chain. Our agents can pick up reports at his grandfather's home, either directly or through contacts. We'll get messages through to you the same way, Biff."

Renault looked to Ensel for approval and received it.

"That gives us two routes of contact," declared Ensel. "Through Tallard to Keene; and through Junius to Biff. Good enough."

"And there will be a third, if needed," added Renault. "Jon Zelka, the Chairman of the Chess Congress, has been alerted to the situation. He had been wondering why the Chess Congress had been invited to meet at the Hotel Mondeau, practically cost free. He was shocked when he learned that a counterfeiting cartel was secretly financing it as a cover-up for their activities."

"And as a way of bringing its head men together,"

added Ensel. "That's one of the main things to have Tim Larkin watch for, any so-called chess experts, who look as though they are something else."

The conference ended on that note. The group left the watch factory, and all went their separate ways, with Renault giving a final reminder that they were bound to absolute secrecy and that they would be notified of any changes in the situation.

Biff and Uncle Charlie took the big teleferic car from Hautburg up to Mondeau, but since there were other passengers, they said very little during the trip. Upon reaching the hotel, however, Charles Keene decided to put a prompt end to the dual role that they were playing. He stopped in the office and smilingly told the manager:

"My name is Charles Keene, and this is my nephew, Biff Brewster. We are friends of Timothy Larkin and his representative, Bert Shelby. They told us that they had reservations here and suggested that we come and take their rooms until they arrived, so we did. And only just now"—Uncle Charlie was laughing—"we find that we have been registered as Shelby and young Larkin by mistake. What should we do? Register for ourselves?"

"That would be a good idea," replied the manager. "I'll explain it to the clerk. You can keep the rooms you have until your friends arrive. Meanwhile, I'll have other rooms assigned to you."

Later, Biff smiled to himself as he gazed from his

window and studied the lights of Hautburg far below, and the answering twinkles from Altamont, the little hamlet so far above. Odd, how easily things could all work out, if you only gave them a chance.

Then Biff's gaze settled on that vast expanse of darkness just above the hotel, the stretch that included the old mine on the Red Ledge and the secret it held. That gloom had become strangely ominous tonight.

Perhaps it was still too soon to count on everything working out exactly as it should!

CHAPTER XVII

The Perfect Trap

THE Chess Congress opened a few days later, and Tim Larkin was one of the first persons to arrive. Biff was watching for him in the lobby, and they exchanged a warm greeting, much to the amusement of a few guests who had earlier mistaken Biff for Tim. The two boys had lunch with Uncle Charlie, and right afterward Bert Shelby arrived with the group he had been piloting around Switzerland.

Introductions and explanations were in order. Shelby proved to be a jolly sort, but he became serious when chess was discussed and it was obvious why Tim Larkin liked to get away from him. Shelby's worry over Tim's chance of winning was a greater strain on Tim than the coming tournament. When Tim said as much, Shelby finally capitulated. With a forced smile, he said:

"All right, Timmy boy. Relax and spend some time with Biff. I'll stay out of your hair, Tim. But you'd

better be good in that tournament play—or else!”

Tim brooded over that when they reached Biff’s room.

“Or else!” repeated Tim. “That’s what Bert always says! Why can’t he give me something else to think about besides chess? I play better when I’m alert to other things as well.”

“I’ll give you something then,” declared Biff, knowing that the time was ripe. “Listen to this, Tim. Listen carefully.”

In exact detail, Biff related his adventures since his arrival at the Hotel Mondeau. Tim listened more and more avidly as the account progressed. The strange disappearance of the man from Berne, the adventure on the Red Ledge, the standing turn of events at the watch factory, all held Tim breathless. When Biff told how Pierre Renault had turned out to be a friend, representing both the United States Secret Service and Interpol, and that Biff now was working with him, Tim was at fever pitch.

If ever an eager beaver wanted to help, it was Tim Larkin. So Biff gave him his opportunity, exactly as scheduled.

“You’re to pick up what you can,” explained Biff. “If you overhear anything unusual, or if you run into players who are trying to get by with a fake game, or anything else you spot, tip me off and I’ll pass it along.”

“That’s a tall order, Biff,” began Tim, a bit glumly.

“A couple of players could set up a standard end game and sit there mulling over it so naturally that nobody would know the difference. I can’t go snooping into every corner hoping to hear counterfeiters talking over their plans.”

“You’re right, Tim. I guess they’d clam up.”

“Worse than that, they’d go right into their chess game. Wait, though!” Tim suddenly brightened. “I have it, Biff! Bert Shelby has arranged for me to take on forty players in a blindfold match tomorrow afternoon. That’s when I can pick up plenty!”

“A blindfold match,” echoed Biff, “against forty players! But how can you keep your mind on anything but chess?”

“Because I remember everything,” rejoined Tim. “I’m not trying to be boastful, Biff,” Tim’s tone was very serious, “but it’s just the way my mind functions. Photographically, where memory is concerned. Do you understand?”

“In a way, yes—”

“Look, Biff. Could you remember five chess games at once? Or even three games? Or even just two?”

“I couldn’t even remember just one, Tim.”

“That proves my point, Biff. With me, it’s different. I visualize a board, make a play, and go on to the next, and so on. In fact, on and on. Always, when I come back to a board and my opponent names the play he made, the whole picture returns again.”

“You sure have a chess mind, Tim.”

"I have a photographic mind," corrected Tim, "just like I said. I remember every little detail, Biff, like my opponent's tone of voice, a whisper from some onlooker, any snatches of conversation elsewhere. What's more, it all comes back to me later."

Biff gasped incredulously. "It all comes back to you later?"

"Of course. How else could I play forty blindfold games, if my mind didn't do such tricks? Now look, Biff, if any of these counterfeiterers are posing as chess players, that's when they will be likely to try it."

"You mean by playing against you in a blindfold match?"

"That's right," acknowledged Tim. "You see, Shelby arranges it as a stunt, rather than a serious contest. I purposely speed up my play, so the audience won't get bored. I like to win at least thirty-five games out of forty—"

"Then you only lose five games at most?"

"Oh, no, Biff! Of those five, I should manage to get two draws, or maybe three. But the point is, even a fair player can stay along with me during a blindfold match, as I don't worry so long as I hold a slight edge. And if there are any chess fakers at this Congress, that's when they'd show up."

"I see what you mean, Tim."

"And they'd also get chatting among themselves between moves. I hear a lot when I walk around. We'll go over that afterward."

* * *

The blindfold match took place as scheduled, and Biff was among the interested onlookers. It lasted all afternoon and there were times when Biff went out for a breather. But Tim kept on and on, just as he had said he would, unmindful of the ordeal.

He was right, too, about people chatting among themselves. Biff could hear slight, buzzing talk, always remote from the board where Tim was making his actual play, but a lot of it took place when the young chess wizard was passing by.

At the finish, with thirty-seven wins, two draws, and one loss, Tim looked limp as a rag, but he insisted upon going up to Biff's room and on the way, he seemed chipper indeed. But when he reached a big chair by the window, he practically collapsed and lay gasping with half-closed eyes. Anxiously, Biff asked:

"Is there anything I can get you, Tim?"

"Yes, a tape recorder"—Tim's voice came in short phrases—"and hurry—so I can repeat things before I'm too—too tired."

Uncle Charlie had a tape recorder and in a few minutes its reels were revolving while Tim Larkin talked into the mike. He referred to different games by stating how the pieces stood and the moves he made. A portion of his recollections ran:

"I had declared check by moving my bishop to king's rook five . . . My opponent moved his king to queen's one. . . . I knew my own king would be

threatened next, so I castled. . . . I went to another board, where my king was in check from an opposing queen. . . . On the way, I heard a man saying, 'What's your next move?' but they weren't talking about chess. . . . Another answered, 'To get my share of the gold and get out'. . . ."

That was one of the few snatches of conversation in English. Others were in French and German, which Tim repeated and translated. Some referred to "the last night" and the "big meeting" that was to be held then. Still others were in languages which Tim did not understand, but he pronounced the words exactly as he heard them. At the end of a half hour, Tim had reached the end. He sank back in his chair and fell asleep.

The problem, as Biff saw it, was to key Tim's recollections and identify the speakers whom Tim had heard, but had been unable to see because of his blindfold. So Biff strolled down and chatted with Bert Shelby. He found that the games had all been recorded and that copies were being typed.

"I'll give you a set after dinner," promised Shelby. "I'm glad you're so interested in chess. That's what Tim needs, a friend of his own age who likes the game as well as he does."

After dinner, Biff gave the tape and game charts to Uncle Charlie, who left the next morning for a plane trip with Roy Tallard. That afternoon, Biff went down to Hautburg to ski with Junius, who gave him a report

that had come through from Pierre Renault. It was a glowing report indeed.

From Tim's comments and the chess charts, they had been able to identify half a dozen important members of the counterfeiting ring. Even the untranslated statements had been so phonetically correct that it was simple to identify their languages and translate them. Evidently, everyone had supposed that Tim's mind was entirely on chess, and that very fact had encouraged them to be unguarded. Renault had arranged for Jon Zelka, the chairman of the Chess Congress, to screen all the suspects and furnish further data.

That was done the next day, during which Tim picked up more talk during other chess matches and put his findings on tape. That went through the usual channel, again with good results. On the final afternoon of the Congress, Junius Croz arrived at the hotel and stopped in Biff's room. Many people from Hautburg had come up to look in on the final matches, so there was nothing to excite suspicion as far as Junius's visit was concerned.

Junius, however, had more than a report. He had instructions, which Biff and his Uncle Charlie read eagerly.

All was set, according to Renault's orders, for the big raid on the counterfeiting headquarters, at dawn tomorrow. A meeting was being held there this very night, which meant that the heads of the ring would

all be trapped. Roy Tallard was to take off in his Piper Cub at dawn, with Charles Keene and two Interpol men. They were to make a landing at the Giant's Mixing Bowl.

Simultaneously, Biff and Junius were to start down from Altamont on skis, guiding another group of Interpol agents who were already waiting in Altamont. Renault, Ensel, and a squad of operatives would be taking over the telecabin line in both directions. Instead of being able to escape by telecabins, the counterfeiterers would be trapped by invaders coming from that very route.

The instructions concluded with the statement that the orders themselves were to be confirmed by Jon Zelka, who would add any last minute amendments. That brought a comment from Charles Keene.

"I only wish Muscles had gotten here," he declared. "He would be a big help tomorrow. But he was taking on some new job of a technical nature and couldn't get here. Well, let's go down and talk to Mr. Zelka."

The chairman of the Chess Congress was a gray-haired man with quick, bright eyes and a tired but friendly smile. He occupied a special office and his desk was stacked with letters and reports in a dozen different languages, which he read and spoke fluently. His own nationality was difficult to determine, and Biff was puzzled when he spoke a single word of greeting: "Lopretni."

Charles Keene responded with the same word,

“Lopretni,” and Biff suddenly realized that it was a countersign arranged by Interpol. Zelka closed the door, shutting off a battery of secretaries who were typing out reports on machines that had keyboards in different languages. Then, looking at Biff and Junius, the gray-haired chairman remarked:

“So these are the boys that Renault mentioned. They look young, and all the better. No one will suspect that they are the guides for tomorrow’s ski expedition. But they should go up to Altamont tonight, to be ready at dawn.” He stroked his roundish, tight-skinned chin and speculated, “I wonder where they can stay.”

“At my cousin’s,” returned Junius. “He lives up there, and I have already sent our skis up to his cottage.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Zelka, in a tone that was a cross between French and English. “I shall go up there with you, long enough to introduce you to the leader of the expedition. A few of our chess players are staying there, so that will be my excuse.”

From his pocket, he drew an envelope which he handed to Charles Keene with the comment:

“Last minute reports. Get them to Renault. He needs them.”

Jon Zelka and the boys then left the hotel and walked toward the platform, where the lights of the telecabins glided by to form a procession up to Altamont. The night was clouded, but not too heavily

to threaten snow. They reached the platform and stepped into a cabin, the boys taking one seat and facing Jon Zelka, who was just about to close the door when a man thrust forward from the shadows and sprang on board.

The cable was hoisting the telecabin upward as the new passenger turned to work on the door catch, keeping his face half-buried in his coat collar. Biff suddenly realized that the man was overlong about it because he was actually clumsy. With the realization, Biff gave a warning gasp which Junius heard and understood.

But it was too late, then, to do anything about it. The man was swinging about, swaying the cabin as he did. His face showed in the light, a broad face with an ugly grin above a blunt chin. It was the bearish man from Berne, who had later vanished from one of these very telecabins, and now was wanted by Interpol as the foreman of a counterfeiting plant.

Biff and Junius exclaimed his name together:
“Hugo Kroft!”

CHAPTER XVIII

Hugo's Big Partner

HOW Kroft had doubled the trail on Biff and Junius, why he had suspected them at all, and what he intended to do right now were questions that neither Biff nor Junius could answer at the moment. But big and brutal though Kroft was, the boys together could overpower him if they acted fast.

Elsewhere, chances might have been against them, but in this cramped telecabin, they could box their adversary. They were wiry and limber; he was big and clumsy, which was all the better in this confined space. There was only one question in their minds: What about Jon Zelka?

Had they the right to risk his safety by fighting for their own? What if they did manage to overpower big Hugo, only to have Zelka suffer? Where would he be in the middle of a rough-and-tumble fray?

They looked for an answer to the man who could give it: Jon Zelka himself. He responded by spreading

his hands, as if saying, "Sit back and relax." Then one hand slid beneath his coat and he brought out a revolver. His tired smile showed life as he pointed the gun toward Kroft. That was when Biff and Junius really relaxed until Zelka told them:

"Stay as you are. This man will handle everything."

Confronted by Zelka's gun and Kroft's glare, the boys had no other choice. The telecabin swayed on its way, while Biff's hopes sank. In a glance, he knew that Junius felt the same way.

Zelka and Kroft were working together!

It wasn't so amazing at that. The two men were extremes. Zelka was so smooth, so important that he had not only been above suspicion, he had inspired confidence as well. Kroft, sneaky by nature and a perfect subordinate, had slipped by unnoticed. Now, the two were taking over together.

The cable continued on its way, then came to an easy stop. The cabin rocked, and Kroft's smile widened. The boys did not have to be told where they were. This could only be the stopping point just over the rim of the Red Ledge. They knew they were right when Kroft opened the door of the cabin and Zelka gestured in that direction as he coolly told them: "Get out. Just drop to the ground. It is only a little way below. You should know."

Yes, they should know. But was Zelka telling them the truth? Or was he forcing them into a plunge as deep as the one Biff had so nearly taken that night at

the Grand Châlet? Biff wanted to know, so he looked out through the door and saw faces grinning up from just below. They had reached the Red Ledge, that was certain, and these were members of Hugo's crew.

There was nothing to do but drop out, as Zelka had ordered, so Biff and Junius did. Each in turn was grabbed by waiting hands before he even reached the ground. Zelka came next, and finally Hugo, who dropped from one big paw and slammed the door with the other as he went. A few moments later, the bouncy gondola sailed off on its cable like a paper going up a kite string.

Biff and Junius were marched along the ledge in the direction of the great stone pile, which loomed as something tremendous in the darkness. Biff noted that their captors kept to the rocky portions of the ledge, avoiding depressions where the snow had drifted. Obviously that was done to avoid footprints which might have been observed by chance passengers in the telecabins. The counterfeiting ring, with Zelka as its brain and Hugo its strong arm, left nothing to chance.

As the boys expected, there was an opening in the stone pile. It was simply, yet cleverly concealed. Coming to a big rock, three men pressed their combined weight against it and caused it to swivel far enough to disclose a series of steep stone steps going down beneath the pile of rubble. Zelka led the way, four men brought the boys along, and Hugo followed with the last few members of the crew.

A light glimmered from a passage below and a still brighter light shone up ahead. When the group neared it, the passage spread into a huge, vaulted chamber which reminded Biff of the caverns that had been hewn as stopping places on the railway up through the Jungfrau, or the ice grotto, where he and Tim had skated on a rink.

Here, the passages and shafts of the forgotten mine had been converted into an underground domain, which became more remarkable, the farther they progressed. Now that Jon Zelka had revealed his true nature, he seemed to revel in it. As he spoke, his eager tone had a slightly high pitch that brought cackling echoes from the vaulted ceiling, while he pointed out the features of his underground realm.

There were sizable bunk rooms for the workers, a dining hall and kitchen. There were storerooms in dead-end passages, filled with crates and boxes, containing enough supplies to last a few dozen men a year.

"That stuff was shipped up from Hautburg months ago!" Junius exclaimed. "We thought it was all going to Altamont, and we wondered why they needed so much there. The town was growing, because it was easy for the workers to come down by aerial cableways, but it wasn't growing that fast."

"Our project was," Zelka assured him, with a laugh that brought a pleased but ugly grin from Hugo, "so we diverted those supplies here. Or, I might say, we

intercepted them.”

He studied the boys keenly, then gestured to then-guards to conduct them along another passage, where a bigger storeroom was stacked with cylindrical steel tanks. Eying Junius, Zelka asked:

“Do you remember these, too?”

“They are tanks of propane gas,” replied Junius. “They ship them up to Altamont to use with gas stoves. A lot more go up full than come back empty. I guess these must be the difference.”

“And what did you say they contain?”

“Propane gas.”

That reply brought a real cackle from Zelka, and Hugo joined with a booming laugh. Junius was annoyed, thinking they were making sport of him. Then, as his captors shoved him along, his face turned grim, like Biff’s. Zelka and Hugo were welcome to their little jokes. Getting out of this was all that mattered to Biff and Junius. But instead, they seemed to be getting in deeper.

“Maybe you wonder where the money comes from to pay for all this,” commented Zelka slyly. “I’ll show you.”

He led the way into the largest room of all, where strong electric lights gleamed from the vaulted roof, showing a modern coin-stamping press and other money-making equipment. Some of the machinery was definitely antique, but purposely so, because of the older coins that were counterfeited here.

Stacks of gold coins glittered from special shelves, but Biff noted that many more were empty. Watching the direction of Biff's gaze, Zelka gave a significant chuckle.

"This is where we make the money to pay for everything," he declared, "but right now, most of it is gone." He turned to Junius and asked, "You know the special cheese they make in Altamont? The kind they ship out in crocks?" Without waiting for Junius to nod, Zelka went on, "Some of those crocks are worth their weight in gold, because we send our coins out in them—to special customers."

Junius was listening in such wide-eyed amazement that Zelka decided to enjoy himself by detailing other tricks of the counterfeiting trade.

"Those music boxes that they make in an old shop down in Hautburg," he continued. "You know the old-fashioned type I mean, the ones with the round cylinders made of solid brass. We improved those, by making thin, hollow cylinders from an aluminum alloy. But they are as solid as ever and even heavier, because each hollow cylinder is just the size to take a stack of gold coins." Zelka paused, then added with a laugh, "Those music boxes, too, go to the right customers."

Junius was now wide-mouthed as well as wide-eyed, but Biff did not share his amazement. Biff was flunking farther ahead, and he was really troubled. He knew that Zelka would not be disclosing all these facts

if there was any chance of word leaking out. That meant that there was no hope of escape for either Biff or Junius. In fact, Biff was wondering if they would ever get out of it alive.

Zelka gestured for the guards to march the boys along. They went down a short flight of narrow stone steps into a square room with dank walls hewn roughly from the solid rock. There were two bunks in the room, but only a single electric light, so the place seemed dim and dismal, like the prison cell it was.

Zelka gestured the boys to the bunks and as they sat down glumly, Zelka lowered his voice to a harsh, cold tone:

“I am meeting with my chief associates tonight. We will be leaving here, taking the last of the gold, and even more important, our latest dies, so that we can resume operations elsewhere on an even larger scale. At that meeting, we shall decide what to do with you. If we decide that you are valuable to us, we may take you along. If not—”

Zelka cut off with a smile that was anything but reassuring. Then, about to turn away, he added coldly:

“Any attempt to escape will be unwise on your part, and you may suffer as a consequence. Hugo will be on guard duty at the head of the steps, so you will be lucky even to get that far. And when Hugo goes off duty, his new teammate will take over, a man just as big and powerful and tough as Hugo.”

With that, Zelka left, but Hugo remained a few

minutes longer, leering darkly from the doorway, which he practically filled. Having thus shown how big and tough and powerful he really was, Hugo went up to the head of the steps, and at intervals the boys could hear him pacing back and forth, staying on constant guard, as Zelka had said he would be.

Talking over their plight, Biff and Junius agreed that there was little or no hope of rescue. Zelka, having won the confidence of Renault, Ensel, and the other Interpol agents, had probably planned everything to perfection. The way he had brought in Hugo to help snatch Biff and Junius out of circulation was proof of that.

The boys broke off their discussion when they heard voices from the steps. Hugo was evidently going off duty and his teammate was coming on. Soon, heavy footsteps lumbered down the short stairs, indicating that the new guard was coming to have a look at his two prisoners. A huge shadow stretched into the light and Junius looked and groaned as he saw the new guard, a hulking, brawny figure, every bit as powerful as Hugo.

Biff looked up, too, but his reaction was just the opposite as he viewed the wide, freckled face and red hair above the new guard's broad shoulders. Biff couldn't believe his eyes as he gasped the name:

"Muscles!"

CHAPTER XIX

One Way Out!

IT WAS Muscles, sure enough, the big, capable airplane mechanic who had proven himself a jack-of-all-trades during his long service with Charles Keene. How Muscles had worked himself into the present situation, but in the opposite camp, was a mystery to Biff. But as he started to ask Muscles about it, the big man shook his head and spread his hands.

“First, let’s hear your story, Biff,” Muscles suggested. “Then I’ll know how the whole thing stands. I’ll fill in from there.”

Junius had heard Biff mention Muscles, and knew how reliable the man could be. So Junius helped speed the story by putting in some comments of his own. Together, the boys gave Muscles a full rundown on the activities of the counterfeiting ring and how Pierre Renault and the Interpol agents were waiting to crack down. But after Biff had finished those details, he added:

“But Renault has trusted Zelka and posted him on all developments, not knowing that Zelka is the real head of the counterfeiting ring. Zelka has shipped out most of the gold and is taking along what’s left. By now, he has tipped off the lesser members of the ring, so they can either slip away or play innocent if Interpol agents question them down at the hotel.”

Muscles nodded as he heard that.

“You are right, Biff. If they don’t have any of the gold and are not actually trapped here, in the counterfeiting plant, Interpol will have no case against them.”

“But they can still clamp down on Zelka,” declared Biff. “He can’t afford to run out and neither can the other bigwigs, his chief associates, as he calls them. I don’t know how many there are of them—”

“There are two besides Zelka,” interposed Muscles, “and of course Hugo Kroft, so that makes four in all. But go on.”

“Well, if you’re counting everybody,” declared Biff, “there is still a crew of workers here. Still, they will be allowed to come and go. By now, Interpol has them all listed and can handle their cases later.”

“And so what are you getting at, Biff?”

“Just this, Muscles. If we can get word through to Renault, he can post agents down at Mondeau and up at Altamont, the only ways that Zelka and his three principal associates, including Hugo, can go. So they will be grabbed whichever way they take.”

"If we have been missed," added Junius, "Renault may have posted agents already."

"That's right," acknowledged Biff, "and Zelka, too, may have been missed. If he has been needed at the Chess Congress, people will be wondering where he is. The big tournament is on tonight, remember? With Tim playing a fellow named Ozzam."

"Zelka should certainly be there for that," agreed Junius. "But what if he and the rest stay up here?"

"Then the raid will take place at dawn," replied Biff grimly. "The ski crew won't have us to guide them, but they will head here anyway, and by then, they'll know for sure that we are missing. Tallard and Uncle Charlie will come by plane; Renault and Ensel by the cable cabins—from both directions—"

"And they'll trap Zelka, Hugo, and the other pair," put in Junius. "But what about us?"

"Zelka will hold us as hostages," declared Biff, more grim than ever, "so as to make a deal. That's why we must get word out if we can. If we can't, the only thing is for Muscles to hide us somewhere here in the mine. What about it, Muscles?"

Muscles shook his head.

"Hugo and his crew would track us down in no time," he declared, "and they are too many for us to fight off. But Renault still would have no chance of trapping Zelka."

"Why not?"

"Because Zelka won't be here to trap," said Muscles,

in a positive tone. "Now that you've told me the whole setup, including the fact that Zelka himself knows about it, his whole game is plain. He knows that tomorrow he will be branded as a crook, so he doesn't care. He's clearing out with his bigwigs."

"But there's no way he can possibly go," argued Biff. "Renault talked about chances of a getaway. Nobody could possibly go up or down the mountainside without showing lights, and Renault's men are on the watch for those. Tallard said it would be impossible for a plane to take off in the dark from the Red Ledge. He's the only pilot who would chance it even in daylight."

"And of course," smiled Muscles, "Zelka heard them say all that. Didn't he?"

"Certainly, because he was supposed to be helping Renault and the Interpol agents."

"That's why he arranged his special getaway." Muscles held up a big hand for silence as he glanced up the steps; then he motioned for the boys to follow him. "Come along and I'll show it to you. What's more"—Muscles lowered his voice to an undertone as they crept up the steps—"we may be able to turn a few tables ourselves."

Biff wanted to know why, but couldn't ask, just then, for Muscles was motioning for strict quiet. They took the passage past the storeroom where the metal tanks were stored, but now they were all gone. As Muscles spread his hands and nodded to signify that

they could talk again, Junius asked:

“What happened to the propane tanks?”

“Propane tanks?” echoed Muscles. “Who told you those were propane tanks?”

“Why, nobody,” replied Junius. “I thought they contained propane and I said so. That’s when Zelka and Hugo laughed.”

“And no wonder,” said Muscles. “Those aren’t propane tanks. They contain hydrogen.”

“Hydrogen?” echoed Biff. “How do they use that here?”

“You’ll see. Very soon, when—”

Again, Muscles broke off and raised a warning hand for silence. A moment later, he was drawing the boys into the darkness of the storage room where the hydrogen tanks had been. Muscles was just in time, for three of Hugo’s workers came filing by, carrying boxes, bags, blankets, and other equipment, some of it quite heavy.

If they had glanced into the storage room, they might have seen Muscles and the boys, for the fight was strong enough. But the men probably were used to seeing the tanks that had been stored there, and didn’t give the empty room any notice. As soon as they had passed, Muscles started toward a side passage and waved for Biff and Junius to follow him.

“We’ll go the long way around,” confided Muscles, “so we won’t meet them coming back. I guess Zelka is anxious to have everything ready for his getaway. The

night is pretty well along.”

Biff wanted to ask more questions, but this still was not the right time. That came when they finally reached an opening among the rocks, where just a flicker of starlight penetrated. Muscles sat down on a stone and remarked:

“Take a breather for a few minutes, fellows, while I fill in those details I promised. It’s an odd thing, Biff, but when your Uncle Charlie sent word to me that he might need me in Mondeau, I had just been offered an unusual job with a lot of money—”

“I know,” put in Biff. “Uncle Charlie said as much.”

“But he didn’t know that the offer came from Mondeau, too, because I didn’t tell him.” Muscles gave one of his broad grins. “I figured that whatever was cooking, I’d be getting in on the other side. So I played mum, hoping I could help your uncle in due time.”

“And this was the job?”

“Yes, but you haven’t heard the half of it. You remember that once I used to do special work on blimps? You know, those dirigibles they use for advertising and such?”

“I remember, Muscles. You worked on stratosphere balloons, too.”

“Correct. That’s why this job was offered to me. I’ve been working on it ever since the night I got here and they brought me up on that cable line in one of those dinky cabins, all hush-hush. But come here—I’ll show you what I’ve been doing.”

Muscles beckoned the puzzled boys through the opening in the rocks. They emerged in a place they recognized despite the dimness. They had come out at the other end of the stone pile and were in the Giant's Mixing Bowl. But the great hollow was empty-no longer. There, almost filling it, looming like some incredible monster, was the nearly inflated gas bag of a huge spherical balloon, with a basket large enough to accommodate a half a dozen passengers!

"It's my baby," whispered Muscles, "all set to go. Look at her straining at those ropes!" His tone seemed to echo the hissing of the hydrogen tanks that were feeding into the big gas bag. "I rigged it up, told Hugo's crew what to do, and then I was assigned to guard duty. So I would be left here, like a dumb cluck, to take the rap with the counterfeiting crew, while Zelka and his chosen few take off for parts unknown with their pots of gold and those special dies. The basket is loaded and the bag is filled enough. See? There they go, to tell Zelka."

There were two men beside the balloon and as one nodded, the other started toward an opening in the rocks. The first man was turning off the valves of the last few tanks and as he finished, he followed the other man, perhaps to remind him of something else. But Muscles didn't wait for anything more. Clamping Biff's shoulder with one big hand, Junius's shoulder with the other, Muscles practically launched the boys ahead of him in a flying dive toward the waiting balloon.

“You want to get out of this mess, don’t you?” Muscles was urging. “You want Zelka and his bunch to get caught here in the raid that’s coming at the crack of dawn? So what’s stopping us from scoring a two-way win? Nothing!”

At that moment, they reached the big balloon, which had suddenly become their passport to safety instead of Zelka’s!

CHAPTER XX

Above the Alps

WHEN Muscles acted, he knew how to hurry, and this was one such time. In one sweep, he hoisted Biff and Junius into the basket, then grabbed one tugging rope and wrenched it loose, ordering them to do the same with the others. While they were trying to copy that example, Muscles swung about to see if the two men who served as ground crew were coming back.

One was. The man drove for Muscles, whose long arms reached him first. Biff, just getting a rope loose, looked up to see a figure flying windmill fashion to a head-first landing. The man rolled over three times and then lay still. By then, Muscles was turning toward the balloon again, only to hear Junius shout, "Look out!"

This time, Muscles had a powerful antagonist to meet. Big Hugo had arrived and was drawing a revolver as he came. That was his first mistake. If he had locked with Muscles, he might have delayed him

until other members of the counterfeiting crew arrived. But Muscles managed to grab Hugo's wrist before he could bring the gun to aim. A moment later, the weapon was twisted from Hugo's hand and fell to the ground un-fired.

Anxious to get back to the balloon, Muscles wasted no time. Suddenly releasing Hugo's wrist, he drove his fist straight up to the bearish man's jaw. Biff saw that jab reach its mark and commented to Junius, "Hugo could have used his beard now!"

Most certainly, Hugo could have, for he needed every possible buffer against that blow. Hugo sagged to the ground, but rallied long enough to make the same mistake twice by pawing for his gun again. That gave Muscles time to act, but the boys by now had the basket almost free, and Muscles couldn't afford to get too far away. So he grabbed one of the empty hydrogen tanks and hurled it Hugo's way.

The big cylinder struck on its side and bowled Hugo's legs from under him, just as he was managing to rise and aim. A forward sprawl landed Hugo on his already softened jaw and he, too, was lying still as the tilted basket broke loose from its final rope. Muscles came diving over the lowered side as the basket was shooting upward. Literally scooped up in mid-air, he sat there regaining his breath as the balloon headed straight up into the pitch-black sky. From far below came shouts, then tiny flickers of light, and finally puny spurts of flame.

Zelka and his two chief associates had reached the launching bowl only to find themselves stranded. Too late, they were firing their revolvers after the balloon that they could no longer see. It was beyond the range of their belated shots.

The great bag cut off what little starlight there was, and neither Biff nor Junius could tell whether or not the balloon was still ascending. Muscles said it was, and the boys fervently hoped that he was right, for they had Mondeau Peak to clear and a host of others almost as tall. So the silent flight continued until a strange dawn tinted the stratosphere.

Then came a singular sight indeed. Far below were vast billows, like the churning whitecaps of a boundless ocean. Tinted a pinkish hue, those bounding waves proved to be mountain peaks, the foamy effect coming from wispy clouds that drifted among them. The balloon was thousands of feet above some of the highest peaks of the Alps, greeting the dawn at least an hour before it was due to break in the valleys far below!

Biff had been on many plane flights, but none of those trips could match this fantastic experience. The very silence of the balloon's glide, the immensity of the huge bag above, made it seem as though the mountains themselves were rolling by. There was something invigorating in the surrounding cold, but the rarity of the atmosphere produced a mental numbness. Fortunately, all the blankets had been

loaded on board, so the voyagers huddled beneath those and waited for the sun to appear.

By the time it did, Muscles had confessed that he was only slightly skilled in navigating a balloon. He felt it would be a mistake to use the valve cord and lessen altitude, because they might have to clear some higher Alpine peaks.

"I know what Zelka's aim was," declared Muscles, speaking slowly to conserve his breath. "With the prevailing winds, he calculated that the balloon would be carried far into Eastern Europe, to some country where he would be welcome. But we don't want to go there."

"We don't even want to go out of Switzerland," declared Biff, "if we can find a landing spot among these mountains."

"If we only knew where we were," groaned Junius. "But they are all alike and we might be among some peaks where it would take a week to find us if we did land!"

So the hours passed. The balloonists found some sandwiches and a flask of coffee in the luggage and had an ample meal. They also found bags of gold coins and boxes of steel dies, which Muscles said would make good ballast to throw overboard, if their hydrogen supply began to fail. In fact, the mountain peaks appeared to be climbing up quite close to them, with valleys barely showing through the wispy clouds. That, to Biff was a danger sign, particularly when

Muscles exclaimed:

“Say, look at that one!”

A craggy, towering peak, monumental in size as well as appearance, seemed to be beckoning the balloon its way. Its lower reaches stretched out like a spreading apron, as though ready to lift up and enfold the floating toy. Though it was Biff’s first view of this giant of the Alps, he recognized it from pictures he had seen.

“The Matterhorn!”

Junius confirmed Biff’s enthusiastic exclamation and told Muscles that the Matterhorn was on the Italian border, just beyond the popular Swiss resort of Zermatt. That was a double argument where Muscles was concerned. He wasn’t anxious to go outside of Switzerland and he didn’t want to land too far from civilization. So Muscles began working on the valve cord.

Less than an hour later, the basket came to a jouncy landing several miles from Zermatt. The boys sprang out and helped Muscles deflate the big gas bag. A short hike brought them to a roadway where cars were already arriving to greet the balloonists. They were taken to a Zermatt hotel, where they put in a long distance call to Mondeau.

The roundup of the counterfeiting ring had been complete. Jon Zelka, definitely a die-hard, had decided to fight it out, once he knew that he was stranded. Instead of sending Hugo’s crew away by the telecabins,

he had armed them and ordered them to put up a strong resistance when the invasion came. But Pierre Renault and Kurt Ensel were fighters, too. They had brought along bombs, grenades, and other equipment. Where they couldn't find openings into the old mine, they blasted them, from both directions.

Finally overwhelmed by a terrific attack of tear gas, Zelka, Hugo, and the rest had surrendered to the law. They had admitted what they knew would be learned anyway, that all their records, including the destinations of the camouflaged gold shipments, had gone away in their balloon, along with their last load of gold and dies.

It was all waiting in Zermatt when Renault and Ensel arrived there and took charge. Charles Keene came with them and brought along Tim Larkin, as well as his manager, Bert Shelby. Tim had beaten Ozzam in the final match of the tournament and was naturally quite excited. He was telling Biff about it, outside the hotel in Zermatt, when Pierre Renault came up to say good-bye.

"You did a great job, Biff," congratulated Renault, "so let's have a real hand-shake on it. The kind to remember."

It was indeed a real hand-shake, with something to remember it by. As Renault walked away, smiling, Biff stared into his open palm and saw the octagonal shape of the special watch case, that resembled a fifty-dollar gold piece. A little present from Renault, as a token of

appreciation.

Just then, a camera clicked and Biff wheeled, suddenly startled, only to see a newspaper photographer taking a shot of Tim Larkin, the new international chess champion. The humor of the situation struck home to Biff.

This adventure had begun with somebody taking a picture of the wrong Tim Larkin, and a mysterious stranger handing Biff a gold coin by mistake. It had ended with the same gold coin being given to Biff to keep, and somebody taking a picture of the right Tim Larkin.

Biff Brewster smiled as he thought back to all that had happened, before things had turned out the way they should be.